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Works of
James Thomson (B.V.)



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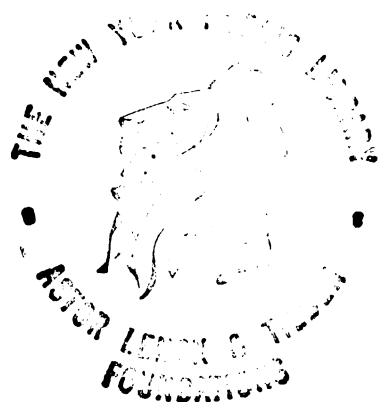
THE POETICAL WORKS

OF

JAMES THOMSON







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THE POETICAL WORKS
OF
JAMES THOMSON







James Thomson

(From a Photograph taken in 1869.)

The Poetical Works of James Thomson

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

VANE'S STORY

WEDDAH & OM-EL-BONAIN

VOICE FROM THE NILE

& POETICAL REMAINS

By JAMES THOMSON

('B. V.')

Edited by BERTRAM DOBELL

With a Memoir of the Author

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

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JAMES THOMSON

TEN years ago I undertook the task, on the death of James Thomson, of editing a volume of his posthumous poems, and of prefacing it by a short account of his life. It has given me a good deal of pleasure since then to observe the steady, if slow, growth of his reputation, which may now be regarded as securely founded, for it is hardly possible, even for those who most dislike the spirit and tendency of his work, to deny that it is made and fitted for endurance. It is true that in popularity he has been and is surpassed by many versifiers who do not possess a tenth part of his genius; but popular favour, I need hardly say, is no sure index of literary excellence. Sudden popularity is apt to be as ephemeral as it is easily gained; but there are, I think, few or no instances of reputations slowly and painfully acquired which have been wholly undeserved, or which have failed ultimately to be maintained.

The destruction by fire of the greater portion of the stock of Thomson's published writings has rendered it desirable, much sooner than otherwise would have been the case, to issue a complete edition of his poems, to be followed, I hope, in time, by a collection

of his prose writings. It is with mingled feelings of pleasure and pain that I re-assume my duties as editor and biographer—pleasure to think that there is now sufficient encouragement to warrant the publication of this book, and pain because it becomes necessary for me once more to retrace the sad life-story of the author. When I first attempted to sketch the outlines of Thomson's biography, I was somewhat at a disadvantage, owing to the fact that the materials then at my command were rather scanty. On reviewing my first essay I find some points in which it seems to require revision or amplification, but I do not find that I made in it any very material mistakes or misstatements. The present memoir, therefore, is a revised and extended version of that prefixed to "A Voice from the Nile, and other Poems." *

Most persons, I think, who read Thomson's writings, will desire to know something of their author. His poems have this in common with those of his fellow-

* Most of my readers are probably aware that an extended Life of Thomson has been written by Mr. H. S. Salt, in whom B. V., I do not hesitate to say, has been fortunate beyond most poets in finding an able and sympathetic biographer. Were this work known nearly as well as it deserves to be, I should think any further essay on my part superfluous; the accident which destroyed the stock of Thomson's writings destroyed also nearly two-thirds of the edition of Mr. Salt's "Life," so that it can at the best only become known to a limited number of readers. With regard to the first sketch of the present memoir, that also is comparatively little known, since less than one-half of the edition of "A Voice from the Nile" had been sold when the remaining stock was destroyed by fire. Many sketches of Thomson's life and v

countrymen, Burns and Byron, that their interest is intensely personal. Most of them are reflections of his own individuality, and their attraction depends upon the skill with which he has rendered his personal feelings interesting to the reader, rather than to his having dramatically expressed the thoughts and emotions of others. The key to his writings is to be found in the events of his life ; and it is only by studying the works in the light afforded by a knowledge of his character and career that their full beauty and significance can be apprehended.

James Thomson was born at Port-Glasgow on the 23rd of November 1834. Both of his parents were Scotch, and James was their first child. His father was a sailor, who had attained a good position in the merchant service.* He is said to have been of a cheerful and sociable disposition, clever in many ways, and with a strong talent for mechanics. His wife, born Sarah Kennedy, was a zealous follower of Edward Irving ; and it seems probable that it was to her the poet

appeared in various quarters, amongst which I may mention particularly that by his friend Bourke Marston, in Ward's "English Poets," and the one by Roden Noel in Miles's "Poets and Poetry of the Century." Mr. G. W. Foote has published some interesting reminiscences of the poet, and he intends, I understand, to collect and extend these in a volume to be issued shortly.

* An absurd rumour gained somehow so much currency as to be alluded to by Mr. William Sharp in the *Academy*, "which attributed Thomson's paternity elsewhere than to the obscure sea-captain"—to no less a personage in fact than that "Poet of the Beautiful" whom the unnatural son satirised so mercilessly in his "Supplement to the Inferno" !

owed his deeply emotional and imaginative temperament. The other members of the family were a daughter, who died in her third year, and a son, John, born in 1842. The family prospered well until 1840, when an event occurred which wrought a great change in their condition. The father, who was then chief officer of the ship *Stewart* of Greenock, was disabled by a paralytic stroke, the consequence, it is said, of a very terrible storm, during which time he was unable to change his drenched clothing. This rendered him unfit to follow his profession, and, moreover, he was thenceforth afflicted with a weakness of mind amounting indeed to imbecility, but still making him a very different man from the alert, clever, and energetic individual that he had formerly been. It is also, though the evidence on this point is not conclusive, that he was prone to excess in drink, and it is thence inferred that the dipsomania by which the latter years of the poet were darkened and which was an inheritance from his father.* However it may be, it seems certain that Thomson's craving for enjoyment, which was, however strange in

* Thomson himself said that all the members of his family who "had brains" were victims to the craving for alcohol. It would certainly be worth while for some student of human nature to endeavour to trace out the causes which frequently link together superior talents with the tendency to intemperance. It is not only among the literary class that this tendency exists—it extends also to the working class, among whom if a workman or mechanic distinguishes himself by extra ability or cleverness, the odds are that he is a

appear, very great, was derived from his father ; whilst he derived his vein of constitutional melancholy and tendency to emotional extremes from his mother.

In consequence of the father's misfortune, the family was compelled to seek humbler quarters, and in 1842 we find them at various addresses in the east of London. They were not, however, without friends ; and through the kindness of some of these an application was made for the admission of James to the Royal Caledonian Asylum. This was successful ; and in December 1842, the voting having resulted in his favour, he entered that institution. Shortly after his admission, his mother died—a blow which the boy, always noted for his keen sensibilities, felt very deeply. His father lived till 1853, but in such a state of ill-health and mental weakness that he was quite unfitted to act the part of a wise or helpful guardian to his sons. Thomson's life at the Asylum may, I think, be considered as having been the happiest period of his existence. Those who knew him during his sojourn there spoke of him as having been a fine, clever, high-spirited youth, always first both in the schoolroom and the playground, and generally popular

to the craving for drink. Of course it would be a mistake to trace a man's literary powers to his indulgence in alcohol or opium ; yet that there is some subtle connection between poetic genius and the craving for stimulants admits, I think, of little or no doubt. I have heard a story to the effect that a person once boasted in the hearing of the late Dr. Marston that he had cured a certain writer of his tendency to over-indulgence in stimulants. "It is a pity," said Marston, "that he has never written a line worth reading since then."

with his schoolmates. He had a natural taste for music, and gained at the school a good practical knowledge of it, being made indeed first clarionet in the school band. His love of it remained with him to the end, and in his latter years his fondness for it formed some alleviation of his unhappy lot. He had also a considerable talent for mathematics, and made good progress in the study of it. In short, the eight (or nearly eight) years which he spent at the Asylum were marked by industrious and successful application to his studies, and might well have been looked upon by his tutors as the prelude to a distinguished career.

The time came when it was necessary to consider what profession he should adopt on leaving the Asylum. His own preference was for a clerkship in a bank or mercantile office ; but this was out of the question, for he would have had to serve for some time without pay, and he was not in a position to do this. The only alternative that offered was to take the advice of his teachers and qualify himself for the post of a schoolmaster in the army. Accordingly he left the Asylum in August 1850, and was admitted as a monitor at the "Model School," at the Royal Military Asylum, Chelsea. Here he became as popular with his schoolfellows as he had been at the Asylum, and here he again proved his superiority as a student. One of his most intimate friends here, as at the Asylum, was George Duncan, a youth of superior talents, who afterwards joined the Indian Civil Service, and who cherished a life-long

affection for him. Thomson's literary tastes were by this time well-developed ; he had already made himself familiar with the leading English classics, such as Spencer, Milton, Swift, Fielding, Sterne, and doubtless Shakespeare, though it does not seem, judging from the rarity of his allusions to the great dramatist, that he ever studied his writings with the sedulous attention which he bestowed upon the works of other authors, and especially on Shelley. His first literary idol, as is so often the case, was Byron, whom he used to "hugely admire" when he was about fifteen ; but a year or two later he fell under the dominion of Shelley, to whom he ever afterwards remained faithful.

An old friend of Thomson's parents, Mr. William Gray, extended his friendship to their son, and it was in his family that the young student spent his holidays during the time that he remained at the Asylum and the Model School. This gentleman had two daughters, Helen and Agnes, between whom and Thomson a warm feeling of mutual regard sprung up. From Agnes, now Mrs. Greig, some of the information here given has been derived ; and I will now quote a very interesting passage from her reminiscences of the youth :—"Being several years younger than James, I cannot recollect much about him as a boy, but I remember we always thought him wonderfully clever, very nice-looking, and very gentle, grave, and kind. He was always most willing to attend to our whims, but my eldest sister was his especial favourite. Her will seemed always law to him. She was gay as he was grave, but whatever

Helen said or did won appreciation from him. . . . Previous to going [to Ireland] he earnestly requested that my sister might be allowed to correspond with him, a request which my parents thought it wiser to refuse. I was allowed, however, to do so, and although his letters came few and far between, I always welcomed and appreciated them. He used to endeavour to guide my tastes, and gave me good advice as to the books I should read, sending me Charlotte Brontë's 'Life and Letters,' Mrs. Browning's 'Aurora Leigh,' some poems by Robert Browning, and a few other books."

"Wonderfully clever, very nice-looking, and very gentle, grave, and kind"—here we have a picture of Thomson in his youth, which, I believe, is in no wise exaggerated or flattering. Quick in acquiring knowledge, he had a memory that retained his acquirements firmly and tenaciously. Languages he mastered easily and thoroughly : and I am assured that he might have won a foremost place as a mathematician had he persevered with his studies in that science. In literature his taste was at once catholic and unerring he could relish Swift as well as Shelley, Fielding as well as Browning, De Quincey as well as George Meredith. I do not think he ever failed to recognize the merits of a really great work, or ever valued a poor or feeble one beyond its deserts. In short, it is hardly possible to imagine a youth of more promise than he was, and none who knew him then could have suspected that he was doomed to a hopeless and joyless existence which was, in his own words, "a long defeat."

Thomson remained at the Model School, Chelsea, until August 1851, when he was sent to the garrison-station of Ballincollig, a village about five miles from Cork. It was customary, before a student was enlisted as an army schoolmaster, for him to serve for twelve or eighteen months as an assistant-teacher, in order to gain a practical knowledge of his profession ; and it was for this purpose that Thomson was sent to Ireland. His duties at Ballincollig consisted in teaching in the regimental school under the direction of the garrison-master, whose name was Joseph Barnes. It was a noticeable trait in Thomson's character that he never failed to make warm friends of those with whom he was brought into familiar contact. It was so here : and no sooner did Mr. Barnes make Thomson's acquaintance than he became a fast friend to him. Barnes was a self-educated man, and had attained his position entirely by the force of his own abilities. In befriending Thomson he was seconded by his wife, a most excellent and kind-hearted woman. In 1862 Thomson wrote a series of six sonnets relative to his early friends and his life at Ballincollig. These sonnets are of such importance in relation to Thomson's life, and tell so well the story of his meeting with his "good angel," of her untimely death, and of his own life-long sorrow for her loss, that I cannot do better than quote them in full,—remarking, however, that their author did not intend them for publication, and that their claims as literature (though by no means small) are secondary to their biographical importance.

TO JOSEPH AND ALICE BARNES.

I.

My dear, dear friends, my heart yearns forth to you
In very many of its lonely hours ;
Not sweetlier comes the balm of evening dew
To all-day-drooping in fierce sunlight flowers,
Than to this weary withered heart of mine
The tender memories, the moonlight dreams
Which make your home an ever-sacred shrine,
And show your features lit with heavenly gleams.
I have with some most noble friends been blest ;
I wage no quarrel with my human kin,—
Knowing my misery comes from my own breast,
At war with Fate by chance and God by sin :
But of all living friends you claim in me
The love most sanctified by memory.

II.

When too, too conscious of its solitude,
My heart plains weakly as a widowed dove,
The forms of certain women sweet and good,
Whom I have known and loved with reverent love,
Rise up before me ; then my heart grows great
With tearful gratitude, and no more pines.
You lovely souls that fitly consecrate
The whiteness of your alabaster shrines !
You tender lives of purest good, that leaven
The monstrous evils of our mortal birth !
There are no female angels up in Heaven,
Because they all are women here on earth :
As once God's sons, God's daughters now come down,
But these to share, not lose, the heavenly crown.

III.

Of all these women fair and wise and good,
Of all save only her who died so young,
Thou art in this angelic womanhood,
Whose solemn praises bards have seldom sung,
Supreme to me—most lovely and most pure,
O second mother of my orphaned youth :
Thou patient heart to suffer and endure,
Thou placid soul to mirror heavenly truth,
Thou gracious presence wheresoe'er you go
To gladden pleasure, or to chasten strife,
Thou gentlest friend to sympathise with woe,
Thou perfect mother and most perfect wife,
Whose priceless goodness shed on worthless me
Makes gratitude itself half agony.

IV.

A man of genial heart and liberal mind,
A man most rich in that rare common-sense,
Whose common absence in its name we find ;
A man of nature scorning all pretence,
And honest to the core, yet void of pride
Whose vice upon that virtue most attends ;
A man of joyous humour, unallied
With malice, never making foes but friends ;
As such all know you, knowing you at all :
But I, dear Guide and Teacher of my youth,
When deeply shamed, yet strengthened, I recall
Your goodness, patience, constant loyal truth
In love for one whose life's a long defeat,
Say—Souls like this keep human nature sweet.

v.

When I trace back from this my death-in-life,
Through years of sensual sin and nerveless sloth,
And weary thought with Earth and Heaven at strife,
And dull decay preventing natural growth :—
Trace back until that period I attain
When still stirred in me living seeds of good—
Some faith in soul, some active power in brain,
Some love in heart, some hopefulness in mood ;
I always reach at last that little room
Wherein we lived a life so sweet and mild,
When he who now lies sleeping in the tomb
Was but an infant, and your only child :
The happy child ! thus saved, still pure in soul,
From our false world of sin and strife and dole.

vi.

Indeed you set me in a happy place,
Dear for itself and dearer much for you,
And dearest still for one life-crowning grace—
Dearest, though infinitely saddest too :
For there my own Good Angel took my hand,
And filled my soul with glory of her eyes,
And led me through the love-lit Faerie Land
Which joins our common world to Paradise.
How soon, how soon, God called her from my side,
Back to her own celestial sphere of day !
And ever since she ceased to be my Guide,
I reel and stumble on life's solemn way ;
Ah, ever since her eyes withdrew their light,
I wander lost in blackest stormy night.

These sonnets, I think, can hardly be too carefully considered by those who are desirous of gaining an insight into the character of the poet : or who wish to discover from what root of bitterness arose that portentous growth, "The City of Dreadful Night." We see in them the profound feeling of gratitude which the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Barnes had aroused in his breast ; the sense of the benefit which he had derived from the good example which they afforded him of goodness of nature and uprightness of conduct ; and his own deep appreciation and almost worship of the peculiar excellences of the best representatives of the female sex. Shakespeare himself, it may be confidently affirmed, had not a deeper admiration or more intense reverence for the surpassing loveliness of character with which some women—and more perhaps than the world believes—are endowed. But it is in the sixth sonnet that we find the key to Thomson's life-story—in so far at least as we can find in one event the key to the complexities of any human soul. It was in the household of Mr. and Mrs. Barnes, as we are here informed, that Thomson first met his "Good Angel"—the young girl so much loved and afterwards so deeply regretted. She was the daughter of the armourer-sergeant of a regiment then stationed at Ballincollig. Her name was Matilda Weller, and she was then about fourteen years of age. That she was a creature of uncommon loveliness, both of person and of mind, seems to be certain. She was described by Mrs. Barnes as resembling in character the Eva St. Clair of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Possibly

Mrs. Barnes was influenced to some extent in saying this by reflecting that a similar fate befell the heroine of fiction and the real Matilda Weller; but there is good evidence to show that the resemblance was not merely fanciful. Thirty or forty years ago it would probably have been difficult to find a reader who was not well acquainted with Mrs. Stowe's famous novel; but it is now comparatively little read, and it is likely enough that Eva St. Clair is a name only to the great majority of the present generation. It seems worth while therefore to quote a short passage from the novel in which the character and appearance of Mrs. Stowe's heroine are described :—

“ Her form was the perfection of childish beauty, without its usual chubbiness and squareness of outline. There was about it an undulating and aerial grace such as one might dream of for some mythic and allegorical being. Her face was remarkable, less for its perfect beauty of feature than for a singular and dreamy earnestness of expression, which made the ideal start when they looked at her, and by which the dullest and most literal were impressed, without knowing why. The shape of her head and the turn of her neck and bust were peculiarly noble, and the long-golden brown hair that floated like a cloud around it, the deep spiritual gravity of her violet-blue eyes, shaded by heavy fringes of golden-brown, all marked her out from other children, and made every one turn and look after her, as she glided hither and thither. . . . Always dressed in white, she seemed to move

like a shadow through all sorts of places without contracting spot or stain."

That this is a substantially correct description of the armourer-sergeant's daughter will hardly be doubted by those who study closely the references which Thomson makes to her in his various writings. These are all in unison with the description I have quoted ; and there is one passage in "Vane's Story" which offers a very close parallel to Mrs. Stowe's conception :—

"—For thought retraced the long sad years
Of pallid smiles and frozen tears
Back to a certain festal night,
A whirl and blaze of swift delight
When we together danced, we two !
I live it all again ! . . . Do you
Remember how I broke down quite
In the mere polka ? . . . Dressed in white,
A loose pink sash around your waist,
Low shoes across the instep laced,
Your moon-white shoulders glancing through
Long yellow ringlets dancing too,
You were an angel then ; as clean
From earthly dust-speck, as serene
And lovely and above my love,
As now in your far world above."

Thomson, at the time he became acquainted with Matilda Weller, was scarcely eighteen years of age, and she, as I have said, had hardly reached fourteen. It may be objected therefore that they were too young to know their own minds, and that a serious and lasting passion could scarcely have grown up at so

immature an age. It must be remembered, however, that Thomson at eighteen was much forwarder in thought, feeling, and experience than most young men are even when they have reached their majority. Dante's passion for Beatrice commenced, he tells us, at nine years of age ; and Shakespeare was married at nineteen. It would be easy to quote many other instances of a similar kind, if it were necessary ; but it is well known that an early development of the affections is a note of the poetical temperament : and Thomson in this respect was only an example of the general rule. Whether there was any formal engagement between the young lovers is not clear ; but it cannot be doubted that it was well understood that Thomson, after a sufficient lapse of time, should claim the young girl for his bride. The girl's parents threw no obstacles in the way, being doubtless well pleased at the prospect of their daughter becoming the wife of so clever and promising a young man. Thus all things seemed to smile upon them, and they enjoyed a brief period of unalloyed happiness.

Ballincollig was also the place where Thomson first met another person, whose influence upon his after-career was only second to that of his "Good Angel." This was Charles Bradlaugh, who was then serving as a private soldier in a dragoon regiment which was for the time stationed at Ballincollig. It was a singular chance which brought together two such remarkable young men, and united them in the bonds of a fast friendship. A greater contrast, alike physical and mental, could scarcely be imagined than was

presented by these youthful companions, who must have been attracted to each other rather by their differences than their similarities of disposition. They were alike, however, in one respect, if in no other, and this, it may be, formed the bond of union between them. Both were looking forward, with the confidence of youth, to a brilliant and distinguished future. Both too, it may be added, gained (in part at least) their hearts' desires, but only when they were faint and weary with the struggle, so that to both of them the triumph, when it came at last, was but little better than dust and ashes. Bradlaugh at this time was a young man of somewhat ungainly appearance, of generous impulses, very positive opinions, much self-confidence, and boundless ambition. In the United States or Australia he must, almost certainly, have gained a very high, if not the highest, place in the public service ; and even in England, had fate but granted him another ten years of life, he would probably have reached the post of member of a Radical administration. As it was he exhausted himself in his efforts to break down the barriers of English conservatism and exclusiveness. That he was sincerely desirous of advancing the democratic cause, and that he was no less sincere in his opposition to the orthodox creed, cannot be doubted, for he could not have failed to perceive that his talents were sure of a readier and richer reward, if exerted on the side of conservatism and respectability, than he could possibly hope for from the Radical and Freethought parties.

Bradlaugh, even before he had entered the army, had made himself known as an advocate of extreme political and anti-theological opinions; while Thomson, who had been pretty well grounded in Presbyterian theology,* had not yet lost his belief in the Christian faith, although his opinions even then diverged a good deal from the straiter paths of orthodox belief. This naturally led to much discussion between the friends, in which they doubtless canvassed, with all the confidence of youth, the leading questions in politics, social science, and theology. Neither seems to have made a convert of the other, nor perhaps was there any endeavour on either side to do so. Their methods of thought and aims in life were radically different, and it was no more possible for Bradlaugh to adopt Thomson's point of view, than it was possible for Thomson to adopt Bradlaugh's. There is no doubt, however, that in spite of the great and essential differences of character which I have indicated, a very warm friendship existed between them at this time, and for many years afterwards. In the army, it is usually considered beneath the dignity of the school-masters, or of those who are in training for that post, to associate with the private soldiers, but Thomson disregarded this convention in Bradlaugh's case to

* He once gave me an account of the sufferings he underwent in committing to memory what is known as the *Assembly's Shorter Catechism*, and of how he used to lie awake in bed, dolefully anticipating the time when it would be his duty to study the Longer one!

such an extent that when the latter was on sentry duty he would frequently help him to pass that monotonous period of time by keeping company with him. Whether Thomson's association with Bradlaugh was productive of ultimate good or harm to him, is a question which does not admit of a decisive answer. It is hardly possible now, considering that Bradlaugh in his latter days came to be looked upon almost as a conservative force, to realise the intensity of horror with which, before his admission to the House of Commons, he was looked upon by the ordinary respectable citizen; and Thomson naturally suffered to some extent by his association with him. Possibly, had he been thrown upon his own resources, he might have achieved fame as a poet and essayist more readily and much earlier than was actually the case. On the other hand, Bradlaugh's friendship undoubtedly shielded him from many difficulties which he might not have had the strength to overcome if thrown upon his own resources; and it must be owned that Bradlaugh's conduct towards him, up to the time of the final disagreement, was characterised by much forbearance and generosity.

Thomson remained in the army as an assistant-schoolmaster for about two years, the regiment to which he was attached being stationed in Ireland during the whole of that time. He was then, according to the usual practice, sent to the Training College at Chelsea, to finish the course of studies necessary to qualify him for the post of a school-

master. The usual practice is for the students to remain at the College for two years, which period is required in most cases in order to fit the candidates for their duties. In his case, however, it was quite unnecessary to keep him there for such a length of time: indeed, he was quite able to pass the necessary examinations after he had been there only six months. Routine, however, exacted a stay of at least eighteen months before he was allowed to receive his appointment as schoolmaster.

It was in July 1853, when his stay at the College was nearly at an end, that he received the news of the death of his beloved. It would appear from a passage in "A Lady of Sorrow" ("she who came suddenly (though indeed her advent had been long before announced) in the brilliant morning of a joyous summer holiday, to dwell with me and possess me;") that some foreboding of her fate, derived probably from his knowledge of her delicacy of constitution, had previously visited him; but the blow came unexpectedly at last. One morning he received a letter telling him that she was dangerously ill: the next day came the news of her death. There cannot be a doubt, I think, that this event was the most important in its consequences of all that ever happened in the life of Thomson. It overshadowed the whole of his subsequent life, rendering his after-career a weary pilgrimage of sorrow. Of its immediate effects we learn on fairly good authority that it was a blow that for the time seemed to stun him—so much so that for three days thereafter he tasted no food, and

afterwards "lay about in the windows" of the Training College in silent misery and despair. His own testimony in "A Lady of Sorrow" confirms this statement. Speaking of his first acquaintance with Sorrow, he says—"I speak not of her, I cannot speak of her, as she came at first; when my spirit was stunned and lay as dead in the body mechanically alive; lay in swoon with but the dimmest consciousness of her presence, sitting down black-veiled beside me many days and nights, speaking not a word, as the friends of Job sat silent at first, for they saw that his grief was very great."

A little doubt has been expressed by some of those who knew Thomson in after-life as to whether the effects of his bereavement were so deep or so permanent as I have represented; but the evidence on this point is altogether irresistible. Few poets have so completely unveiled their inmost feelings in their writings as Thomson has done; and the evidence these furnish is quite sufficient on this point. It may be thought perhaps that such evidence as this is scarcely to be relied upon; for though the poet may or must use his personal experiences as the groundwork of his verse, yet it is probable that in most cases a small modicum of reality forms the basis of much poetic rhetoric. It was so undoubtedly with Byron, who has never been surpassed in his power of turning to poetic use the incidents of his personal experience. One is never quite sure, however, in his case, whether the passion he expresses is quite genuine, or only histrionic. This is not the

case with Shelley, with whom we may always feel confident that the feeling his verse expresses is a genuine reflection of the emotion which inspired it. So also was it with Thomson, who never wrote for mere effect, and who was as far as Shelley from desiring to make poetic capital out of his personal sorrows. Hence his writings may, with very little allowance for poetic heightening, be accepted as faithful renderings of his inner life. Sympathetically studied, they show, as in a mirror, the poet's true self, and the reader need never fear that the emotion expressed is merely that of the player mourning for Hecuba. It may therefore be taken as certain that the death of Matilda Weller was the chief cause of Thomson's unhappiness ; and, though it might be a mistake to assert positively that it was the cause of his pessimistic views of life and nature, which might otherwise have been arrived at, yet there is no doubt at all that it intensified and deepened the gloom of his convictions. Here, however, another and deeper question arises. It cannot be denied that Thomson was naturally of a melancholy temperament ; and it has been urged that the death of his beloved was only the *occasion* and not the *cause* of his life-long unhappiness. Such is Mr. Foote's opinion, and it is at least worthy of consideration. He says :—"I do not agree with Mr. Dobell in regarding this bereavement as the *cause* of his life-long misery. She was, I hold, merely the peg on which he hung his raiment of sorrow ; without her another object might have served the same purpose. He carried

with him, his proper curse, constitutional melancholia." Possibly there is some truth in this : and it is not likely that Thomson would have been entirely happy, however favoured by fate. Yet I do not think it is so certain, as Mr. Foote believes, that "another object might have served the same purpose" as Matilda Weller. On the contrary, I believe that if she had lived to become the wife of Thomson, he might very well have got the better of his melancholy disposition ; and such indeed was his own opinion. I think that the need of exerting himself to provide for family life would have had the happiest effect in preventing him from indulging in the brooding introspectiveness which with him almost amounted to a disease. Doubtless it would also have compelled him to turn his literary talents to profitable account, as he might very easily have done ; and in that case his poetic genius might have remained dormant, or at least its outcome would have been something altogether different from "The City of Dreadful Night." However, it is idle to speculate as to what might have been ; whether the fulfilment of Thomson's dream of love would have saved him cannot be known ; but it is certain that with its destruction all hope of happiness vanished for ever.

In "A Lady of Sorrow," Thomson has told of the successive phases which his sorrow for his lost love underwent. After recovering from the first stunning blow, Sorrow visited him as an Angel, or (partly at least) as an influence for good ; then as a Siren, destroying for him all human delights, making him an

alien from his kind, and afflicting him with distaste for all "the uses of the world"; and finally as a Shadow, ever present with him, ever weighing upon his spirits, ever driving him to brood over the insoluble mysteries of life and death, and ever whispering that death is better than life, that life indeed is a disease and a martyrdom, and that the grave only is man's true goal. This was the history of his inner life: outwardly he remained to his work-fellows and friends, after the first paroxysm of grief was over, much the same as he had been previously. Though he scarcely made a secret of the cause of his unhappiness, and most of his friends had an inkling of it, he does not seem to have taken any of them entirely into his confidence about it. He had, he says in "A Lady of Sorrow," no bosom friend, though he had many work-fellow acquaintances, and of these some were very friendly. Usually indeed he was very reticent as to his personal affairs, and only spoke about himself when specially requested to do so. His entire absence of egotism, and power of fitting himself to his company, rendered him a very agreeable companion; and I never heard of any one who had known him, who did not speak of him kindly and sympathetically. If a fault could be charged against him, it was that he may have been a trifle too conscious of his intellectual superiority to those about him; but this he scarcely ever allowed to be seen, and perhaps it ought not to be mentioned. If it be added that he was capable of strong resentment, when he thought that he was in any way wronged or slighted, and that he may, on rare occa

sions, have taken offence when none was meant, all has been said that can be said in relation to his failings as a friend or comrade.

Thomson was finally enlisted as an army school-master in August 1854, and thereupon left the Training College, being appointed to serve with a militia regiment in Devonshire. Here he was by no means comfortable, the men amongst whom he was thrown being very rough and uncultivated. He afterwards joined the Rifle Brigade at Aldershot, where he remained during 1855 and part of 1856. As to the manner in which he discharged his duties as a school-master, it may be said that he was an efficient and painstaking teacher, despite the fact that it was a profession for which he had little or no liking. He was always very methodical and exact in his ways, and the thorough manner in which he mastered every study which he took up, rendered it an easy matter for him to impart his knowledge to his pupils. Yet he could not but feel that he was out of his true element, and that he was, for the most part, labouring in vain. One of his friends in the army was Mr. James Potterton, also a schoolmaster, to whom he wrote some letters which have been preserved. One of them, written in familiar verse, expresses his feelings as regards his profession, and a quotation from this will render clear his sentiments regarding it :—

“ And if now and then a curse (too intense for this light verse)
Should be gathering in one's spirit when he thinks of how he lives,
With a constant tug and strain knowing well it's all in vain—
Pumping muddy information into unretentive sieves ;

Let him stifle back the curse, which but makes the matter worse,

And by tugging on in silence earn his wages if he can ;
For the blessed eve and night are his own yet, and he might
Fix sound bottoms in these sieves too were he not so weak
a man."

From Aldershot, Thomson was removed to Ireland in the summer of 1856, where he served with the 55th Foot, with which regiment he remained until he left the army. During the years 1856-1860 he was stationed either at Dublin or the Curragh Camp. Here his life seems to have passed in a somewhat monotonous routine. He chafed against its dullness, and had a great longing for a more stirring and adventurous career. He even discussed with his friend John Grant, likewise an army-schoolmaster, and at that time a great chum of his, a plan of deserting the army and going to sea. There can be little doubt that could he have found an adequate field for the exercise and display of his practical abilities, the result would have been beneficial in the highest degree. But it would have been necessary that circumstances should have forced him into action, for he was one of those in whom, as in Hamlet, the power of acting is enfeebled or destroyed by much brooding over the consequences of action. That he was himself conscious of this infirmity, a poem entitled "Twenty-third Birthday" abundantly proves. The biographical interest of this poem is so great that I am strongly tempted to print it in full ; but I am prevented from so doing by the fact that the

author, shortly before his death, desired that it might not be published, as he had then altogether outgrown the mood in which it was written. I see no reason, however, why I should not summarise its purport, and even quote a few illustrative passages from it. It begins with a description of the night before his birthday, which closed in a wild storm of wind and rain :—

“ With such wild dirge and ceaseless streaming tears,
Died out the last of all my ill-used years.”

The next morning (November 23, 1857) rose pure and fresh and beautiful. Though the year is so near his end, he is still healthful and not so decrepid—

“ But that he still can deck himself with flowers :—
Would that like his could be my dying hours !”

But he, alas ! is cheerless and depressed, for he can find no comfort in reviewing the history of his past years. He reflects upon them—

“ With even less of grief than sharp self-scorn.”

They have been wasted and misused, and he can see no comfort in looking forward to the future. The golden hours of youth, which should have brought strength, wisdom, faith, and love have vanished beyond recall :—

“ All lost for ever ! and the hours to come,
Poor refuse ! but our sole remaining wealth,
So much the likelier thence to share their doom !
The brain unused to mark insidious stealth,

Short-sighted eyes long filled with mist and gloom,
Lax hands uncustomed to the grasp of health,
That lost the fight in their best youth,—shall these
Victorious prove in languor and disease?

Oh, for the flushed excitement of keen strife !
For mountains, gulfs and torrents in my way,
With peril, anguish, fear and strugglings rife !
For friends and foes, for love and hate in fray,—
And not this lone base flat of torpid life !
I fret 'neath gnat-stings, an ignoble prey,
While others with a sword-hilt in their grasp
Have warm rich blood to feed their latest gasp."

It is rather a death-in-life than a natural and healthy existence that he is enduring ; and his torments are heightened by the thought that the means of deliverance are close at hand could he but reach them :—

"Flushed grapes, full-charged with life's delirious wine,
Brush my wan temples, hanging thick about :
Chained fast I cannot reach them, while I pine
To press their very inmost rapture out,
Flooding with fire these dust-dry lips of mine ;
Better wild drunkenness than hectic drought :
And torture breeds new tortures in the dread
That ere they fall my power to drink be dead."

Yet he hopes and feels that, even now, he may break free from the prison-house of despair, and by mingling with his fellows in the battle of life attain peace of mind and strength to endure whatever ills fate may inflict upon him. Then follows an allusion to the project of going to sea which I have already mentioned. The poem concludes with three very

vigorous and characteristic stanzas, which I must quote in full :—

“ So much more strength, so much more life, I say ;
So much more love and thought, more soul and sense :
We pare our members bit by bit away,
Because they're damning us with foul offence :
Cowards ! be strong and force them to obey !
Is virtue but a eunuch's continence ?
Napoleon, ev'n, seems nobler than such saint
As eighteen centuries have learned to paint.

Thus Hope is born,—pale birth of grim Despair.
Whether the father shall his child devour,
Or this poor babe, maturing strong and fair,
Shall dispossess the parent of his power,
I know not : yet I think that I could dare
A death-stern struggle with the fiercest hour,
Would foolish wisdom's whirls of dreary thought
But leave my doubt-vexed spirit undistraught.

Meanwhile, then, let me wait and hope, and learn
To curb with galling steel and ruthless hand
These strong and passionate impulses that burn
To sweep me from my post of self-command,
Into the battle raging thick and stern,
Into the desert's freedom vast and grand :
That horseman proves full strength, firm skill indeed,
Who holdeth statue-calm his savage steed.”

I have dwelt longer upon this poem, and quoted more freely from it than it may be thought I am warranted in doing, considering the author's desire to suppress it ; but I cannot think I am inflicting any wrong upon his memory in so acting. There is nothing in the poem, I need hardly say, which is in

the slightest degree discreditable to its author ; rather it exhibits him in a favourable light, as testifying to his intense conscientiousness, and his solicitous desire to rule his life by the highest principles. No doubt the sentiment is somewhat overstrained, and it shows a good deal of the impatience and eagerness for results of youth. At twenty-three it is far too early to despair because one has not yet achieved any great deeds or attained to a settled philosophy of life. But such is, and ever has been, the mood of the young poet, and Thomson was only going through a sufficiently common experience. Perhaps indeed it is only persons of abnormal vanity, or of much obtuseness, who do not experience at some period of their lives the feeling of intense dissatisfaction with themselves which Thomson has, in this poem, so powerfully expressed. That he eventually got the better of this mood, and came to see that he was what he was by the law of his nature, and that by no means could he make himself otherwise, will be seen further on.

It need hardly be said that there was little or no real reason for Thomson's self-reproachful mood. He was, in fact, in spite of the melancholy which oppressed him, making rapid progress in maturing and increasing his literary powers. He was a great reader, and usually spent many of the hours of the night in perusing his favourite authors. He also spent much time in studying foreign languages, for which he had a special faculty. He taught himself, with little or no help from masters, Italian, French, and German. Dante and Leopardi in Italian, Balzac

in French, and Goethe and Heine in German literature, were his great favourites, and each of these undoubtedly influenced to a considerable extent his views of life and art ; moreover, he was carefully qualifying himself at the same time for his vocation as a poet by the writing of much verse, the greater part of which he committed at a later period to the flames. From 1852 to 1860, which may be looked upon as the period of his apprenticeship to verse, his poetical industry was very great. Unlike most poets, however, he was in no hurry to rush into print, for it was not until 1859 that he made an effort to get any of his poems published. The most remarkable of his early poems is "The Doom of a City," which was founded partly on the story of the petrified city in the "Arabian Nights." Comparing this with "The City of Dreadful Night," written some fifteen years later, it is found—while curiously anticipating his greatest poem in some points—to be more diffuse in style, less full of lurid and Dante-like power, and less firm in its grasp of thought. Yet it is, nevertheless, a very remarkable production for a youth of twenty-three, and has some striking merits. In a few passages, indeed, it may almost challenge comparison with the later poem ; and the one is so obviously the elder brother of the other that it is worth while to study the earlier poem if only for the purpose of tracing the germs of many of the ideas which are found fully developed in "The City of Dreadful Night." Both are profoundly pessimistic in tone—though in the earlier poem the pessimism seems to

display itself in its author's despite—and both display a great and uncommon daringness of thought and imagination. In both poems the most remarkable quality is perhaps the painter-like power which the author displays of bringing the scenes described with astonishing clearness and vividness before the mental vision of the reader. No poems that I am acquainted with would furnish more numerous or inviting subjects for the pencil of the artist, who would discover, in realising the poet's conceptions, that he could not do better than follow faithfully the author's descriptions, wherein he would find that no necessary detail of the picture had been overlooked, though there is never any undue insistence on points of little importance.

"The Doom of a City" furnishes interesting evidence as to the change which took place in the author's opinions between the time of the writing of that poem and "The City of Dreadful Night." The author of the earlier poem believes in an overruling providence and in the immortality of the soul. He strives to reconcile the existence of evil with belief in a benevolent Creator, and labours to show that mankind are themselves responsible for the miseries they endure. Yet it may be perceived, from the inconsistencies and, as it were, special pleading of the poem, that Thomson was trying to convince himself that he believed these doctrines, rather than holding them with a firm conviction of their truth.

In July 1858 Thomson's poem, entitled "The Fadeless Bower," appeared in *Tait's Edinburgh*

Magazine, with the signature of "Crepusculus." He continued to contribute to the pages of that magazine until it was discontinued in 1860. "Bertram to the Lady Geraldine," "Tasso to Leonora," "The Lord of the Castle of Indolence," and "A Festival of Life," were among the poems which he contributed to its pages. That at the time of their publication they did not attract any attention, may perhaps be accounted for by considering that *Tait* at that time had sunk very low both in circulation and influence.

In 1858 Mr. Bradlaugh, who had left the army in the previous year, and was then fairly started on his career as a secularist lecturer and writer, became the editor of a small periodical, called the *London Investigator*. Thomson had already contributed to its pages, in February 1858, a satirical poem entitled "Mr. Save-his-Soul-Alive O!" which was described as by "Bysshe Vanolis." This was the only occasion on which he used that signature in full; afterwards his contributions to the *Investigator* and the *National Reformer* were signed only with the initials "B. V." As to his reasons for adopting that pseudonym it is clear that "Bysshe" was chosen in order to show his devotion to Shelley; and "Vanolis" as an anagram of Novalis, the pen-name of the German mystic and poet, Friedrich von Hardenberg.*

* It will be remembered that the life and character of Novalis were largely influenced by the untimely death of a young girl to whom he was deeply attached. Hardenberg, however, was not so inconsolable as Thomson, for he formed another attachment in no long time after his first love's death. A closer

Thomson contributed to the *London Investigator* "The King's Friends," a prose allegory, and essays on Emerson and Robert Burns. The latter was written on the occasion of the centenary celebration of the poet's birthday. Few or none of the innumerable essays which were poured forth on that occasion can compare with it as a vindication of the life and genius of the ploughman-poet.

In June 1860, the regiment to which Thomson was attached was transferred from the Curragh Camp to Aldershot. Thomson had long been desirous of this change, for he had grown weary of his residence in Ireland. After his return to England, he took an early opportunity of visiting his old friends the Grays; and Agnes Gray (now Mrs. Greig), with whom he had corresponded during his residence in Ireland,* and whose early recollections of him I have already quoted, gives this account of his visit :—

"At last he wrote saying that he was to have a fortnight's holiday, and would pay us a visit. We were all excitement at his coming. I had previously informed him in one of my letters that Helen had become a Ragged School teacher, and in reply he said that he could not imagine a creature so bright and in his remembrance so beautiful being arrayed in sombre habiliments, and acting such a character.

parallel to Thomson's story was that of another German poet, Ernst Schultz; but of him Thomson knew nothing until a few months before his death. Thomson translated the "Hymns to Night" of Novalis.

* See Mr. Salt's "Life of Thomson," in which several of his letters to Miss Gray are printed.

When he arrived Helen met him in the most demure manner possible, and kept up the delusion, or rather tried to do so, for he was not to be deceived. Two days after his arrival, when he was sitting reading, she suddenly sent something flying at his head, at which he started up, saying, 'Ah ! I have just been quietly waiting for this ! you have been acting a part which does not become you, but you have now resumed your true character, and are the Helen of old.' During this visit, we thought him much altered in appearance and manners ; indeed, we were somewhat disappointed. He was by no means so manly-looking as when he left London, and was painfully silent and depressed. He went from us with the intention of again going to Aldershot, but from that day until Mr. Maccall* mentioned him to us we never once heard of him. Ever since we have felt greatly puzzled to account for his singular conduct."

It is no wonder that these young ladies, knowing nothing of the story of his lost love, were puzzled to account for his silence and depression. It is strange, however, that he failed afterwards to keep up his friendship with them. There is evidence to show that he was neither ungrateful nor forgetful of their kindness to him ; and the only probable reason I can think of for his conduct, is that his intense feeling

* William Maccall, author of "Elements of Individualism," and of many other remarkable but unappreciated works. He published in 1886 a booklet entitled "A Nirvana Trilogy : Three Essays on the Career and the Literary Labours of James Thomson."

of his supposed personal unworthiness caused him to look upon himself as unfitted to associate with them. The passages I have quoted from the poem on his twenty-third birthday have shown how much he suffered from these moods of self-dissatisfaction ; and further evidence on the same point is contained in "Vane's Story," which may be looked upon as the poet's Autobiography and Apologia, when read with due discernment.

" I half remember, years ago,
Fits of despair that maddened woe,
Frantic remorse, intense self-scorn,
And yearnings harder to be borne
Of utter loneliness forlorn ;
What passionate secret prayers I prayed !
What futile firm resolves I made !
As well a thorn might pray to be
Transformed into an olive tree ;
As well a weevil might determine
To grow a farmer hating vermin ;
The *I am that I am* of God
Defines no less a worm or clod.
My penitence was honest guile ;
My inmost being all the while
Was laughing in a patient mood
At this externe solicitude,
Was waiting laughing till once more
I should be sane as heretofore ;
And in the pauses of the fits
That rent my heart and scared my wits,
Its pleasant mockery whispered through,
*Oh, what can Saadi have to do
With penitence ? and what can you ?
And Shiraz roses wreathed with rue ?*"

It will be noticed that the above passage, besides depicting the fits of despair "that rent my heart and scared my wits," records also his deliverance from them. This was written in 1864; and no doubt he had at that time attained a calmer and more stoical frame of mind. But I doubt if he ever entirely vanquished these moods; for there are a good many indications in his writings which seem to show that to the last he suffered bitterly from the feeling that he was, in a sense, an outcast from humanity, or one who had sinned almost too deeply to be forgiven. Few men could have been more dissimilar in character and disposition than Cowper and Thomson, yet there was a strange likeness between them in the fact that each was afflicted with the disease—for such it was in their cases—of self-distrust and self-reproach. Both were men of acute sensibilities, which verged upon, and sometimes overpassed, the borders of morbidity. Cowper's fits of insanity were paralleled by Thomson's seasons of vinous indulgence. It was the same cause at bottom which led Cowper to look upon himself as a damned soul, and Thomson to regard the whole world as a scene of black and immitigable despair. There was wisdom, after all, in the prayer of the man who begged the Lord to give him a good conceit of himself; for truly he who looks upon himself as unfit to live is thereby unnerved and unarmed for the battle of life. Even in cases where there is good reason for self-reproach or remorse (and I need hardly say that I do not believe there was such reason in Thomson's case, any more

than there was in Cowper's), it is infinitely better that the offender should atone for his misdeeds by future good conduct rather than by useless brooding over the past. I fear, however, that I am now indulging in rather cheap philosophy, which is likely to benefit neither the reader nor the victims of self-distrust ; so I will cut short my reflections and resume my story. But I must first quote a very clever epigram in which Thomson has satirised, with the insight derived from his own experience, the moods in which we accuse ourselves of being desperate sinners :—

“ Once in a saintly passion
I cried with desperate grief,
O Lord, my heart is black with guile,
Of sinners I am chief.
Then stooped my guardian angel
And whispered from behind,
'Vanity, my little man,
You're nothing of the kind.' ”

In 1860 the *National Reformer* was established under the editorship of Messrs. Barker and Bradlaugh. Dissensions, however, soon broke out between the editors, and very soon the paper presented the strange and amusing spectacle of a duello proceeding in its pages between the two champions of Free-thought. This could not last, of course ; and eventually Barker was ousted, and Bradlaugh became sole editor and proprietor of the paper, which he thenceforth controlled to the time of his death. Of course it was natural that Bradlaugh should ask his friend, with whom he had kept up a correspondence since

he had left the army, to contribute to its pages. Thomson responded to the invitation, but his contributions were not very numerous in the early period of the paper's existence. His first important contribution to the *Reformer* was an essay on Shelley. It is a most eloquent tribute to the genius and essential greatness of the "poet of poets." Another early contribution was his poem entitled "The Dead Year," which appeared in the number for January 6, 1861. This is a fine, but very gloomy and pessimistic review, not so much of the events of the past year, as of the general course of human affairs, which, in the poet's eyes, show little or no evidence of improvement, but rather a continuous scene of bloodshed, strife, and unhappiness. In 1863 the first of the poems which display his great and peculiar merits, namely, the one entitled "To our Ladies of Death," appeared in the *Reformer*, and thenceforth his contributions to it, both in prose and verse, became much more frequent. It is unnecessary to enumerate the various writings of his which first appeared in Mr. Bradlaugh's paper; but it may be stated generally that a large proportion of his best work, both in verse and prose, was first printed therein. That his writings attracted little attention there was hardly to be wondered at, for the *Reformer* laboured under the fatal stigma of not being a "respectable" paper. Its readers were chiefly members of the working-classes, who were not, perhaps, so well prepared to appreciate the fine literary gifts of "B. V." as the more popular and slashing style of the editor.

Yet it was perhaps fortunate for Thomson that the columns of the *Reformer* were at all times open to him ; for in it he could publish without restraint his most heterodox essays, a privilege which he would have enjoyed in no other paper with which I am acquainted. "Vane's Story" and "The City of Dreadful Night" would have sought admission in vain into the pages of any "respectable" contemporary journal.

An event happened in 1862 which materially altered Thomson's position and prospects. I borrow the following passage from Mr. Salt's "Life" as the best account of the circumstance :—

"In 1862, when his regiment was at Portsmouth, it chanced that Thomson went on a visit to a fellow-schoolmaster at Aldershot, and in the course of a stroll in the neighbourhood of the camp one of the party, out of bravado or for a wager, swam out to a boat which was moored on a pond where bathing was prohibited. An officer demanded the names of those present, and on this being refused further altercation followed, with the result that a court-martial was held on the recalcitrant schoolmasters. No real blame seems to have attached to Thomson, but he paid the penalty of being one of the incriminated party, and was discharged from the service on October 30, 1862."

Thus ended what may be considered as Thomson's period of apprenticeship to life and poetry. Thus far, though he had written a good deal of verse, and much of what he had written was full of promise to

a discerning eye, he had produced little or nothing that would have been likely to survive, had not his later achievements lent a reflected glory to his early efforts. But his powers were now rapidly approaching maturity, and henceforth we shall see him steadily increasing his powers of imagination and expression—powers that, if they had only had free play unchecked by adverse circumstances and a comparatively early death, would, I am confident, have placed him on a level with all but one or two of the greatest poets of the present century. That, in spite of his many disadvantages, he accomplished so much is sufficiently marvellous. Under the sunshine of good fortune and the stimulus of appreciation he would have been capable of efforts, not more powerful indeed than “The City of Dreadful Night”—for that could not be—but informed with a richer and more varied music, a more sympathetic outlook upon humanity, and a calmer and more stoical philosophy.

As to his career in the army, I think we may fairly conclude that it formed, on the whole, a good and useful training for him. Had he, as he himself desired, become a clerk in a mercantile office, he would have seen much less of life and nature than his position in the army enabled him to observe. It is possible, indeed, that the jovial good-fellowship which is one of the chief characteristics of life in the army, may have done him some harm by developing that tendency to excess which was a fatal defect of his temperament ; but this must probably have shown

itself in any other way of life, though perhaps not till a later period.

I have dwelt, I find, at somewhat disproportionate length on the early part of Thomson's life, and I must run over the remaining period rather rapidly; referring readers who wish for a more detailed account to Mr. Salt's volume. On leaving the army, Thomson applied to Mr. Bradlaugh, who was then acting as managing clerk to a solicitor named Levison, to know whether he could find employment for him. It is only just to Mr. Bradlaugh to state that he treated Thomson with great kindness and consideration. He not only gave him an engagement as a clerk, but also took him into his own household, where for several years he remained as a member of the family circle. It is doubtful if Mr. Bradlaugh ever appreciated his greatness as a poet; but he certainly had much respect for his other talents, and a great liking for him as a man. Mrs. Bradlaugh also had a great esteem for him; while Alice and Hypatia, their two young daughters, quite idolised him. The latter has recorded her impressions of him in a most interesting paper, entitled "Childish Recollections of James Thomson." Her account of the manner in which he exerted himself to please and amuse her and her sister gives a most engaging picture of him as he then was. I should like to borrow largely from Mrs. Bonner's "Recollections," but I must content myself by recommending my readers to consult her article for themselves; or, as this is now out of print and unobtainable, to refer

to the summary of it given in Mr. Salt's "Life." They will find there several letters written by Thomson to Mr. Bradlaugh's daughters, which are in his happiest and pleasantest style.

The records of Thomson's life from 1862 to 1869 are somewhat meagre. He contributed during that period a good deal of prose and verse to the *National Reformer*, and made unsuccessful attempts to get some of his writings inserted in one or other of the magazines of the time. In October 1866 he ceased to be an inmate of Mr. Bradlaugh's household, though he still remained on affectionate terms with its members. He then took lodgings in Pimlico, first in Denbigh Street, and afterwards at two other addresses. His status here, and at another lodging in Huntley Street, Tottenham Court Road, to which he removed in 1873, and where he remained almost to the end, was that of the "single man" lodger, who occupies a furnished bedroom, and takes his meals (or some of them) with the family. He felt the change from his more comfortable life with the Bradlaughs a good deal, there is no doubt; but his life in the army had accustomed him to "roughing it," and he had no desire to push his way into genteel society.

In October 1869 "Sunday up the River" was inserted in *Fraser's Magazine*, which was then under the editorship of Mr. Froude, who was so struck with the merit of the poem that he asked Charles Kingsley's opinion upon it, which was warmly in its favour. Froude invited Thomson to breakfast with him, an

invitation which he was of course glad to accept. He found the famous historian very cordial and homely, so that he was quite at ease with him. It might be thought that here was an opening for Thomson to appeal to a more cultivated if not a wider audience ; but "Sunday up the River" excited no notice from the public or the critics, and nothing came of its publication. Thomson submitted "Weddah and Om-el-Bonain" to Froude, who did not see his way to accept it, and its author does not seem to have made any further effort to gain admission to the pages of *Fraser*.

In a fragmentary diary which Thomson kept at this time there is a strange entry, which must be quoted :—

"*Sunday, Nov. 4, 1869.*—Burned all my old papers, manuscripts, and letters, save the book MSS. which have been already in great part printed. It took me five hours to burn them, guarding against chimney on fire, and keeping them thoroughly burning. I was sad and stupid—scarcely looked into any ; had I begun reading them I might never have finished their destruction. All the letters ; those which I had kept for twenty years, those which I had kept for more than sixteen. I felt myself like one who, having climbed half-way up a long rope (thirty-five on the 23rd inst.), cuts off all beneath his feet ; he must climb on, and can never touch the old earth again without a fatal fall. The memories treasured in the letters can never, at least in great part, be revived in my life

again, nor in the lives of the friends yet living who wrote them. But after this terrible year I could do no less than consume the past. I can now better face the future, come in what guise it may."

It is impossible to help regretting this wholesale sacrifice, which Thomson himself was probably sorry for when less under the dominion of the despondent mood which led him to make it. Though the main lines of Thomson's character and the leading events of his life stand out in clear relief, yet there must be few who are interested in him at all, who would not have been glad of the additional light which must have been derived from the papers thus destroyed. And though it may be that the poems which were included in the holocaust were youthful efforts and scarcely worth preserving, yet it must be regretted that their author did not subject them to a careful examination before committing them to the flames.

A letter which he wrote in 1872 to his sister-in-law, Mrs. John Thomson, for whom he had a strong liking, gives an account of his doings during 1870-72 :—

"You think I have left Mr. B., and wonder what I am about, and I often wonder myself. Mr. B. gave up city business altogether more than eighteen months ago, in order to devote himself solely to the great business of illuminating the benighted intellect of the nation on social, political, and religious matters. For some time after he left I did nothing, an occupation which would suit me exceedingly well, and for

which I have fine natural talents that I have taken care to cultivate to the best of my abilities. That is, would suit me extremely well on a fortune, or in a semi-tropical climate ; but here, without money, it is a luxury too ethereal for my taste. Afterwards I did some work in a printing-office, reading proofs, revising, &c. ; and, as to this, I will only say that if ever you have the misfortune to be condemned to penal servitude, and they offer to commute the sentence for such work in a printing-office, you had far better stick to the penal servitude. I then became secretary *pro tem.* to one of the thousand companies which came into being last year, and in some very hard commercial campaigning have already had two companies killed under me. I am at present astride a third, which may carry me out safely or may not ; it has received three or four shot and sabre wounds already, but seems tough and tenacious of life. By-the-bye, our slain companies brought nobody down but the riders ; our friendly foes, the shareholding public, having received all their money back. As I was nearly thirty when I came to London, I could not go through the regular course in any business, and have had to seize whatever honest chance offered. Perhaps some fine day I shall turn up a trump and win a good stake ; it is much more probable that I shan't. In the meantime, having no one to look to but myself, I quietly take things as they come, and quietly let things go as they go, fortifying myself with that saying of the philosopher, that it matters not in this vale of tears whether we wipe our eyes with a

silk or cotton handkerchief, or blink through tortoiseshell or gold-rimmed eye-glasses. Perhaps the said philosopher had himself the silk handkerchief and gold-rimmed glasses, or perhaps he did not use a handkerchief nor wear eye-glasses, and was thus enabled to be so philosophical on the subject. Not that I need to wipe my eyes in this vale of tears, for I always find the prospect much too sad or much too comical for weeping."

Early in 1872 Thomson became secretary of "The Champion Gold and Silver Mines Company." In the latter part of April of that year he was sent out by the directors to Colorado to look after the interests of the Company at the mines, and send over reports as to the prospects of the enterprise. This proved to be one of his pleasantest and most enjoyable experiences. The business he had to attend to did not occupy very much of his time; and though he was confined pretty much to one district, he was able to look about him, and form his own opinion as to the character of the American people and the destiny in store for them. His general judgment on what he saw, together with some characteristic personal confessions, are expressed in the following extract from a letter which he wrote to a friend while there:—

"I think we must forgive the Americans a good deal of vulgarity and arrogance for some generations yet. They are intoxicated with their vast country and its vaster prospects. Besides, we of the old

country have sent them for years past, and are still sending them, our half-starved and ignorant millions. The Americans of the War of Independence were really a British race, and related to the old country as a Greek colony to its mother-city or state. But the Americans of to-day are only a nation, in that they instinctively adore their union. All the heterogeneous ingredients are seething in the cauldron, with plenty of scum and air-bubbles atop. In a century or two they may get stewed down into homogeneity—a really wholesome and dainty dish, not to be set before a king though, I fancy. I resisted the impression of the mere material vastitude as long as possible, but found its influence growing on me week by week : for it implies such vast possibilities of moral and intellectual expansion. They are starting over here, with all our experience and culture at their command, without any of the obsolete burdens and impediments which in the course of a thousand years have become inseparable from our institutions, and with a country which will want more labour and more people for many generations to come.

“I am quite well again. Though never perhaps very strong, and rarely so well as to feel mere existence a delight (as to a really healthy person it must be ; no inferior condition, in my opinion, deserves the name of health), I am seldom what we call unwell. When travelling about I always find myself immensely better than when confined to one place. With money I believe I should never have a home, but be always going to and fro on the earth, and walking up and

down on it, like him of whom I am one of the children."

While he remained in America he was stationed at Central City, then a comparatively small and undeveloped town, which was, however, the headquarters of mining in Colorado Territory. The district is exceedingly picturesque; and Thomson, who was, like most poets, keenly susceptible to the beauties of wild and uncultivated nature, greatly enjoyed the magnificent panorama of mountain scenery which extended around the city. In a letter to Mr. William Rossetti,* Thomson gives a vivid description of the scenery and the people of the district in which he was sojourning. This letter, printed at length in Mr. Salt's "Life," should be read as well for its literary excellence as for its illustrations of its author's character.

About the middle of July, while still at Central City, Thomson had a rather sharp attack of mountain fever, a malady which attacks most persons not natives of the district who remain there for any length of time. He "felt at death's door," as he writes in his diary, for two days, but he speedily recovered, and the fever seems to have left no ill effects behind. Besides the letter already mentioned to Mr. Rossetti,

* With Mr. Rossetti, Thomson had become acquainted in 1872, when, on the publication of "Weddah and Om-el-Bonain" in the *National Reformer*, he sent a copy of the poem to that gentleman. The latter, recognising its great excellence (which was also recognised by Dante Rossetti), wrote to the then unknown "B. V." to express his admiration. A correspondence followed, and also some personal intercourse, which lasted till within the last year or two of Thomson's life.

Thomson wrote some very interesting epistles to Mrs. Bradlaugh. I should like to quote from some of these, did space permit, but I must content myself with referring readers to Mr. Salt's "Life."

Thomson remained in America nearly eight months. It had soon become evident to him that the Company which he represented had embarked upon an unsound speculation, and that the best thing that could be done was to wind up the business as speedily as possible. On December 28 he started from Central City on his return journey, and he arrived in London about the end of January 1873. Thus ended one of the pleasantest episodes of his career.

The Company was dissolved soon after his return, and he was once more without employment or means. In July of this year he obtained through Mr. Bradlaugh's recommendation the post of special correspondent to the *New York World* in Spain. A contest was proceeding at the time between the then Republican government and the Carlists. The cause of the latter was apparently prospering, and it was supposed that they were about to make a bold stroke and march upon Madrid. This, however, they did not attempt, and though there was much marching and counter-marching there was little real fighting. Thomson saw, however, some desultory skirmishing in and about Estella on August 19 and following days; and on the 30th of the same month, at Viana on the Ebro, he witnessed a contest "more like a frolic of schoolboys than a serious fight." In September Thomson was for a time prostrated by an attack of

sunstroke. As he failed to communicate with his employers as frequently as the latter thought he should, he was recalled, and returned once more to London on September 23, having been absent about two months. He gave an entertaining account of his experiences in Spain in the pages of the *Secularist*, March and April 1876.

On his return from Spain Thomson was for some weeks in a bad state of health, one consequence of which was a severe cold in one of his eyes which rendered him incapable of reading or writing, and (perhaps an even greater deprivation) of smoking. On his recovery he again endeavoured to get employment in the City; and after a time succeeded in obtaining a secretaryship to another company; but this also soon failed.

At the beginning of 1874—which was to be made memorable by the first publication of “The City of Dreadful Night,” and by the first faint reverberations of the fame which that poem was destined to bring him—Thomson was again without employment, save that he was now, as he had been for some time past, contributing pretty regularly to the pages of the *National Reformer*. The first fortnight of the year—“a pleasant fortnight,” he styled it in his diary—was spent with Mrs. Bradlaugh (who was now living apart from her husband) and her children at Midhurst. He never afterwards obtained any commercial employment, but was thenceforth compelled to depend upon his literary talents for the supply of his very modest wants.

"The City of Dreadful Night" was commenced in 1870, and about one-half of it was then written. It then remained untouched till 1873, when it was roughly finished. It was finally revised at the beginning of 1874, and its publication in the *National Reformer* commenced on March 22 of that year. The other portions of the poem appeared in the numbers for April 12 and 26, and May 17. Mr. Bradlaugh's paper could scarcely be considered as a good medium for introducing it to the public; but so remarkable a poem could scarcely have failed to attract attention wherever published. Thomson was, I think, a good deal less anxious than most poets for fame and recognition; but it is certain that the notice which his great poem excited was extremely gratifying to him. The first public notice of the poem appeared in the *Academy*, which printed a very laudatory paragraph respecting it. This led a writer on the *Spectator* to obtain a copy of the poem, which he then made the subject of an article, that, while censuring its tone and spirit, yet did some degree of justice to the great powers of the author. These notices caused a considerable demand for the numbers of the *Reformer* containing the poem, which, however, soon went out of print, so that Thomson's most remarkable work was practically unprocurable from 1874 to 1880, when it was first published in book form. Even more gratifying to the author than the public notices of his poem were a few private acknowledgments which he received from some distinguished persons. Of these the one Thomson valued most was that

he obtained from George Eliot, an authoress for whom he cherished a great admiration. He forwarded a copy of the poem to her, to which she responded by a letter which gave him much gratification. The letter was as follows :—

“DEAR POET,—I cannot rest satisfied without telling you that my mind responds with admiration to the distinct vision and grand utterance in the poem which you have been so good as to send me.

“Also, I trust that an intellect informed by so much passionate energy as yours will soon give us more heroic strains with a wider embrace of human fellowship in them—such as will be to the labourers of the world what the odes of Tyrtæus were to the Spartans, thrilling them with the sublimity of the social order and the courage of resistance to all that would dissolve it. To accept life and write much fine poetry is to take a very large share in the quantum of human good, and seems to draw with it necessarily some recognition, affectionate and even joyful, of the many willing labours which have made such a lot possible.—Yours sincerely, M. E. LEWES.”

The famous novelist, it will be seen, while acknowledging the power of the work, does so in a rather lofty style (which was, however, only the manner of writing which had then become habitual to her); but hints her disapproval of the intense pessimism of the poem. Thomson sent a reply to her letter, a portion of which must be quoted, because in replying

to George Eliot he replied by anticipation to many other persons who have since objected to the intense gloom of "The City of Dreadful Night":—

"DEAR MADAM,—Having been absent for several days, I am only now able to thank you for your very kind letter, for your generous expression of praise, and for your yet more generous expression of trust, though this, I fear, will prove to be misplaced.

"I have no Byronic quarrel with my fellows, whom I find all alike crushed under the iron yoke of Fate, and few of whom I can deem worse than myself, while so many are far better; and I certainly have an affectionate and even joyful recognition of the willing labours of those who have striven to alleviate our lot, though I cannot see that all their efforts have availed much against the primal curse of our existence. Has the world been the better or the worse for the life of even such a man as Jesus? I cannot judge; but I fear on the whole considerably the worse. None the less I can love and revere his memory. A physician saves a life, and he does well; yet perchance it were better for the patient himself and for others that he now died. But it is not for me to introduce such thoughts to you."

In a later note he gave a further explanation of his position:—

"In my note of Thursday I omitted to qualify, as I intended, the general statements by the distinct

admission of what, however, is in all likelihood quite obvious—that the poem in question was the outcome of much sleepless hypochondria. I am aware that the truth of midnight does not exclude the truth of noonday, though one's nature may lead him to dwell in the former rather than the latter.”

Other persons who expressed their great admiration for the poem were Mr. W. M. Rossetti—ever generous in his appreciation of unknown or obscure talent—and Philip Bourke Marston, the unfortunate blind poet, whose fate bore much resemblance to Thomson's, and who, like him, was destined to an untimely death.

I shall now proceed to give some account of my own acquaintance with the poet, first asking the reader to pardon whatever appearance of egotism there may be in the narrative. I became a reader of the *National Reformer* shortly after it was started; and my attention was soon attracted by the contributions of “B. V.” The first poem of his which gave me assurance of his greatness was that entitled “To our Ladies of Death,” which appeared early in 1863. I was convinced at once that this must be the work of a genuine poet; and thenceforth I looked eagerly in each number of the *Reformer* for fresh contributions from the pen of “B. V.” Each new poem or essay of his deepened my admiration of his talents; and I often wondered whether the mysterious initials did not mask the name of some author of established fame.

When "The City of Dreadful Night" appeared in the *Reformer*, it was not published in successive numbers of that paper, the editor probably thinking that so strong a dose of pessimism would be too much for the mental digestion of a good many of his readers, if administered too frequently. There was an interval of three weeks between the publication of the first and the second instalments of the poem. This led me to fear that it had been determined not to publish anything beyond the first part, and I wrote to Mr. Bradlaugh expressing my disappointment at the non-appearance of the continuation of the poem. While doing so, I also took occasion to express my strong admiration of "B. V.'s" writings in general, and more particularly of his poetry. Mr. Bradlaugh handed my letter over to Thomson, who was pleased thereupon to write me the following letter :—

"DEAR SIR,—I have just received from Mr. Bradlaugh your note about myself, and hasten to thank you heartily for your very generous expression of approval of my writings. While I have neither tried nor cared to win any popular applause, the occasional approbation of an intelligent and sympathetic reader cheers me on a somewhat lonely path.

"You must not blame Mr. Bradlaugh for the delay in continuing my current contribution to his paper. He is my very dear friend, and always anxious to strain a point in my favour ; but as an editor he must try to suit his public, and the great majority of these

care nothing for most of what I write. As for this 'City of Dreadful Night,' it is so alien from common thought and feeling, that I knew well (as stated in the Proem) that scarcely any readers would care for it, and Mr. Bradlaugh tells me that he has received three or four letters energetically protesting against its publication in the *N. R.*, yours, I think, being the only one praising it. Moreover, we must not forget that there is probably no other periodical in the kingdom which would accept such writings, even were their literary merits far greater than they are.

"I address from the office of the *N. R.*, because I am just now rather unsettled, and not sure what will be my private address for some time to come. While preferring to remain anonymous for the public, I have no reason to hide my name from such correspondents as yourself.—I am, dear sir, yours truly,

"JAMES THOMSON (B.V.)."

In replying to this letter, I expressed a wish to become personally acquainted with the writer. He was pleased to accede to my request, and thenceforth we remained on terms of friendship up to the time of his death. "Why don't you publish your poems in book form?" was naturally one of the first questions I put to him. Thereupon he explained that he thought it very unlikely that any publisher could be found who would risk money in publishing them, and that he had no means of paying for their publication himself, as most modern poets have to do. This led me to make an offer of such assistance as might

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but, however this may be, their periodical was of an unusually bright and entertaining character. It was conducted by Mr. John Fraser, whose success in discovering unknown talent, and in availing himself of it, made him a model editor. The contributors were paid on a very liberal scale, and Thomson derived more advantage from his contributions to the *Tobacco Plant* than from any other of his literary engagements. To its pages he contributed articles on Ben Jonson, Rabelais, John Wilson, James Hogg, and Walt Whitman ; also reviews of books, a series of papers on tobacco legislation, &c. He was, in short, one of its most constant contributors from 1875 until it was discontinued in 1881.

Shortly after Thomson's secession from the *National Reformer* a new Freethought periodical was projected by Messrs. G. W. Foote and G. J. Holyoake. With Mr. Foote, who had a great admiration for his writings, Thomson had become pretty intimate, and he at once promised to co-operate in the new undertaking. The *Secularist* was started in January 1876, and during the eighteen months of its existence, Thomson was one of its most constant contributors. His articles in it were on the most various topics, and any one who now looks through a file of it, can hardly fail to be impressed with a sense of the great versatility of his powers. There is a disposition on the part of some of his critics to assert that his talents were confined within a very limited range, and one of them has expressed the opinion that "The City of

Dreadful Night" is the only one of his works which posterity will care for. So great a mistake can hardly be made by any one who will read through his writings in the *Secularist*. One of his most important contributions to it was a series of articles on Heinrich Heine, who (after Shelley) was the author with whom Thomson was most in sympathy, and whom he had most thoroughly studied. His translations from him have gained general praise; and it is certain that no other translator has so well rendered the spirit and music of Heine into English. One of the projects which were cut short by his untimely death was a book on Heine, which he had undertaken to write.

I will now quote a few passages, which are of general or personal interest, from his letters to me. The following paragraph, which is from a letter dated June 20, 1874, refers to a poem by Mr. W. M. Rossetti, which I had sent to him:—

"‘Mrs. Holmes Gray’ I want to read carefully before returning. If he wrote that in 1849, when he must have been very young, I can’t understand how he came to abandon poetry for criticism. It is quite mature in firm grip of the subject, and has no youthful faults of redundancy, rhetoric, exaggeration, ornament for ornament’s sake, affectation, and so forth."

In a letter dated June 24, 1874, after referring to the notice in the *Academy* of "The City of Dreadful Night," he adds: "I have just written to the editor thanking him and his critic, and saying that it seems

to me a very brave act on the part of a respectable English periodical to spontaneously call attention to an atheistical writing (less remote than, say, Lucretius), treating it simply and fairly on its literary merits, without obloquy or protesting cant."

I quote the following passage from a letter dated January 9, 1876, because it gives his answer to some censures that have been passed upon his use of certain words in his poems :—

"With regard to Mr. A. H. Bullen's criticisms on 'Our Ladies of Death'—criticisms which really flatter me, as any man's work is really praised by such examination—I must hold myself right. The only English Dictionary I have by me is a school one, but as such little likely to venture on neologisms ; moreover, it is very good of its kind, being Reid's of Edinburgh. This gives Sombre, Sombrous, dark, gloomy ; Tenēbrous, Tenēbrious, dark, gloomy, obscure (and of course Tenebrious implies Tenebriously) ; Ruth, pity, sorrow ; Ruthful, merciful, sorrowful ; Ruthfully, sadly, sorrowfully. The huge Worcester Webster, into which I looked a day or two after your letter came, agrees as to tenebrious and ruth ; I forgot to look in it for sombrous. But as to ruth, I used it in the common sense of pity, not that of sadness and sorrow. When I wrote—

'My life but bold
In jest and laugh to parry hateful ruth,'

I meant to parry the pity of others, not to parry my own sadness, which, indeed, jest and laugh must

intensify instead of parrying. My thought was much like that of Beatrice, 'The Cenci,' Act v., Sc. 3 :—

' Shall the light multitude
Fling at their choice curses or *faded pity*,
Sad funeral flowers to deck a living corpse
Upon us as we pass, to pass away ?'

And from the light indifferent multitude, as you must know, curses are even less unwelcome than pity when we are profoundly suffering. I looked into the Dictionaries not knowing whether their authority would sustain or condemn me, as I am used to trust in careful writing to my own sense of what is right ; this, naturally, having been modified and formed by reading of good authors. Even had the Dictionaries condemned me, I should in these cases have been apt to assert my own correctness ; in many others I should be ready to yield without contest. In 'The City of Dreadful Night' I used tenebrous instead of tenebrious ; just as good writers use, as it happens to suit them, either funeral or funereal, sulphurous or sulphureous (Shelley often in 'Hellas'), &c. You will think I have troubled you with many words on a very little matter. . . . As it is now just eleven P.M., and I have much to do to-morrow, I will conclude in pity for myself if not in ruth for you."

The following extract is from a letter dated November 1, 1878 :—

"I am very sorry but scarcely surprised that things are not very flourishing with you just now. You are correct in supposing that it is ditto

with me. With the natural depression of trade infinitely aggravated during the past two years by the wretched impolicy of our Jewish-Jingo misgovernment, it cannot be well with anybody but arms-manufacturers, exchange speculators, and Hebrew adventurers ; and things seem likely to grow much worse before they get better. . . . The 'Improvisations'* I shall be delighted to see. It is so scarce that I have never yet been able to come across it, and have never seen any mention of it save that by Rossetti in his supplementary chapter (a very fine one) to the 'Life of Blake.' It is not even in the British Museum, having been printed for private circulation only, if I remember aright. I should think it would be a real treasure to any of Wilkinson's few admirers ; for, as you know, the fewer the devotees of any man or thing, the more enthusiastic."

The next extract is from a letter dated December 23, 1878 :—

"Many thanks for the 'Improvisations.' . . . A brief glance at it, and perusal of the remarkable note at the end, make me anticipate its study with unusual interest. . . . Just lately and in these days I am pretty busy for Fraser ; and well for me that it is so, for I have not earned a penny

* "Improvisations from the Spirit," by Dr. Garth Wilkinson. Thomson was a warm admirer of Dr. Wilkinson's writings, and, under the title of "A Strange Book," he published a series of articles on the "Improvisations" in the pages of *The Liberal*, a monthly magazine.

save from him the whole year. There is more work to do on the Tobacco Duties ; and also verse and prose for the Christmas card, but not so much as last year, nor offering such genial opportunities and associations as Chaucer's *Canterbury Pilgrims*.* The subject this time is the Pursuit of Diva Nicotina, in imitation of Sir Noel Paton's Pursuit of Pleasure. Paton is a good painter and poet too, but of the ascetic-pietistic school, or with strong leanings to it."

Under the date of October 19, 1879, he writes :—

"I can still but barely manage to keep head above water—sometimes sinking under for a bit. You see what I do for Cope. I have not succeeded in getting any other work except on the *Liberal*, and this is of small value. . . . I thank you for keeping the Whitman† for me : I sold it with other books when hard up. In the meantime I have the latest 2 vol. edition in hand from Fraser, who has requested some articles on him when Tobacco Legislation, &c., will allow. I mean to begin him now in the evenings at home, as the Legislation can be done only in the Museum. He may occupy such intervals in the paper as did the Wilson and Hogg, both done by request : the 'Richard Feverel' was on my own suggestion. George Meredith, to whom I sent a copy, wrote me a very flattering because very high-minded

* This refers to two large coloured plates which were issued with the *Tobacco Plant*, and for which Thomson wrote explanatory and descriptive matter in verse and prose.

† Whitman's "Leaves of Grass."

letter. He has seen the 'City,' and though by no means sanguine with such a public as ours he thinks it should float a volume. The admiration of so many excellent literary judges really surprises me. . . . All this about myself because I have nothing else to write about, going nowhere and seeing no one."

During the seven years following the composition of "The City of Dreadful Night," Thomson had ceased almost entirely to write poetry. This was partly owing, no doubt, to his absorption in journalistic work, but much more to the want of encouragement and appreciation which he had met with. There was indeed only one noteworthy exception to his silence as a poet during these "seven songless years," as he himself called them. During the evenings of September 16, 17, and 18, 1878, he was engaged in the composition of a poem, which is still in MS., because it was one of the author's last desires that it should not be published. I regret this very much, because, in view of its autobiographical interest and importance, it is certainly a pity that it should be suppressed. Thomson, however, only objected to its publication because he considered it to be imperfect in literary form, and not because of its subject-matter. His own words with respect to it are that he considered it "too hard and harsh in both conception and execution for attempt at polishing—far more truth than poetry in it." I think, therefore, that though I am bound to respect the author's wish as to not publishing the poem in its entirety, there can be no

harm in giving a prose epitome of it, with the quotation of two or three of its verses. What follows then is an imperfect summary of a poem in which Thomson laid bare his inmost soul—or at least believed himself that he had done so. All men are liable to self-deception in a greater or less degree; but I think that Thomson's analysis of his own heart and mind may be accepted as true in all essential points.

“ I had a Love ; it was so long ago,
So many long sad years ;
She died—and then a waste of arid woe,
Never refreshed by tears :
She died so young, so tender, pure, and fair :
I wandered in the Desert of Despair.”

What then, he continues, kept him from following his dead love, and led him still to tread the barren ways of life? What drugged his keen intent to sink or soar in the dark abyss of death? How has he existed so long with no well-spring of comfort for his soul, no aliment for his forlorn heart, and unsupported by Faith, Hope, and Love? His heart, he replies, has fed upon itself, “the bitter poisoned meat,” his soul has drunk its own scant fountains dry, and his feet have year by year circled in their old footsteps in the drear desert of life. He plods for ever upon burning sands and bruising stones, and all he sees are the dry bleached bones of men and camels, and vultures watching for their prey. He himself would fain lie down and become a part of the carrion banquet, but alas! he is goaded by some unblessed goad from such long-wished-for rest.

"Songs in the Desert ! Songs of husky breath !
And undivine Despair ;
Songs that are Dirges, but for Life not Death,
Songs that infect the air
Have sweetened bitterly my food and wine,
The heart corroded and the Dead Sea brine."

How strange it is—we can confront the direst woes if we may have the poor relief of uttering our sorrow in the form of music, painting, sculpture, verse or prose. So potent with us is the Word, and Art, which urges us to perpetual strife with Death, is so tenacious that its magic can keep us living in our own despite. The splendours of creative art cleave the sepulchral glooms of death, and revive the ancient dead : lowly tombs become by its aid grand palaces :—

"Funereal black to royal purple glows,
And corpses stand up kings from long repose."

And yet, my Love, not a night has passed since you left me that I should not have welcomed with serene delight the command "Go sleep, go sleep, thy long day's travail done." Ah ! my Love, with what perpetual moan, while yet I half-believed that you were a radiant spirit by the Heavenly Throne, did my weak and selfish heart pray to have you back from the Divine realm !

"You would have kept me from the Desert sands
Bestrewn with bleaching bones,
And led me through the friendly fertile lands,
And changed my weary moans
To hymns of triumph and enraptured love,
And made our earth as rich as Heaven above."

But now, when he sees that Immortality is a vain dream, and that she, his dead love, is indeed lost to him for ever, and that at death all mankind are resolved into the Universe whence they were so mysteriously evolved—now when he sees that all the little race of man are but as mites in infinities of Time and Space, and our earth is but as a

“ Many-insect-peopled drop of dew
Exhaling in a moment from the view ”—

now that by grievous thought he has learned something of the truth about Life and Death and about himself—why now if he were to find that there is indeed a living God, and he were to hear his voice proclaim that his dead love should be restored to him, and that she should come back to him as young and fair as when she died, and that he also should be restored to youth and vigour, and that they should then lead a long and happy life together in a home brightened with the faces of happy children—even then he would reply, “Lord of the Universe, pity and pardon me, I shudder from this blessing as a curse, and supplicate from my soul that thou wilt not alter our fate. For she now enjoys eternal rest, and I too am near the shore of that eternity wherein is found an end of all our woes.

“ I would not tear her from her resting-place
For any human bliss ;
I would not one of my past years retrace
Who seek the black abyss ;
I would not have the burden on my soul
Of bringing babes into this world of dole.”

It gives him solace now instead of grief to brood over her fate and murmur, "She died so young, so tender, pure, and fair." And now too his own good time cannot be long delayed. How piteous is life and how sublime is death ! Why, O why, was the human race ever created ?

" What profit from all life that lives on earth,
What good, what use, what aim ?
What compensation for the throes of birth
And death in all its frame ?
What conscious life hath ever paid its cost ?
From Nothingness to Nothingness—all lost ! "

So ends this remarkable poem, which, though lacking the poet's last touches, and consequently less perfect in form than Thomson's other writings, seems to me to be full of an infinite pathos, which may compare without disadvantage with any poem of its kind—if indeed it does not strike a deeper note of grief and hopelessness than any poet had ever before sounded.

There is a very curious supplement or postscript to these verses which is too characteristic to be omitted. It is as follows :—

" Writing the foregoing lines I have felt like a man making his will at the gates of Death summing up Life's scores, and settling accounts when about to leave its inn. Yet I do not truly feel very near to Death, for with a seeming partial revival of the creative energies in thought and imagination, it is impossible to realise death, even when absorbed by its sombre fascination. It may be merely the throes of some

new birth that give the lethal illusion ; for birth is so like death.

“I do not hate a single man alive,
Some few I must disdain ;
I have loved heartily some four or five,
And of these there remain
Just two, I think, for whom I would outface
Death gladly ; for the one, death and disgrace.”

From the mood of utter hopelessness in which these verses were composed, Thomson was shortly to be, for a brief period, uplifted. Early in 1880 a fortunate inspiration led me to make an application on Thomson's behalf to Messrs. Reeves and Turner, the well-known and energetic booksellers and publishers. I had already proposed to another gentleman that he should publish a volume of Thomson's poems ; but he valued his reputation for respectability far too highly to meddle with anything so heterodox as “The City of Dreadful Night.” Messrs. Reeves and Turner, however, being liberal-minded men, had no scruples of this sort, and it was promptly agreed upon that “The City of Dreadful Night, and other Poems” should be issued at the joint risk of those gentlemen and myself. The book was published in April 1880, and met with a fairly friendly reception from the press and public. Perhaps the most generous and unstinted recognition of the interest and importance of the book was in an article by Mr. G. A. Simcox in the *Fortnightly Review*. Naturally enough the intense gloom and hopelessness of the leading poem were censured by some of the critics ;

but the excellence and power of the writing were generally acknowledged. One acute critic, whose penetration is not usually so much at fault, expressed an opinion that the intensely gloomy character of the poem did not represent its author's real feelings, but was merely assumed in accordance with a prevailing poetical fashion. Thomson must have smiled rather bitterly on reading this, for if ever there was a work which expressed with entire sincerity its author's mind and feelings, that work was "The City of Dreadful Night." It may be said of it indeed that it is the expression of a mind naturally prone to gloom and melancholy, and that it is therefore only the outcome of its author's temperament, and not a true picture of the ordinary facts of human life; but that it is at least a veritable transcript of the poet's inmost feelings no one is likely ever again to dispute. It was the outcome of long years of suffering and hopelessness, the consummate expression of the gospel of despair and pessimism which hard experience had compelled him to embrace, the cry of pain wrung from him not only by his own misfortunes, but also by his survey of the sad and pitiful destiny of all mankind. Let it be conceded that the poem dwells upon one aspect only of human existence, and that another and more cheerful view may be taken of it, yet surely the pessimist—and the note of pessimism is to be found in all great poets, even though it is not their dominant note—may be allowed to express for once his feeling of the futility, the aimlessness, and the wretchedness

of life with whatever force of expression he can command. Schopenhauer, Leopardi, Thomson,—these men, whatever may be the ultimate verdict upon them, cannot be despised as weaklings, or dismissed as shallow thinkers. It may indeed be possible still to remain an optimist after listening to their messages, but it will be thenceforth impossible to dismiss pessimism as the mere consequence of a bad digestion or a morbid brain. The shallow stream, laughing and sparkling on its way, does well to murmur continually its song of content and gladness ; but it has no title to reproach the deep and silent river with its gloom and darkness. To all but the utterly unthinking and frivolous a time comes when it is no longer possible to rest in the belief that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds ; and when we are convinced by grief, anxiety, and suffering that the pessimist, though his creed may need large qualifications, is neither without grounds for his convictions, nor without excuse for his disbelief in the progress of the human race, or in the future amelioration of the hard lot of mankind. The pessimist may be wrong in thinking that his doctrine applies to all mankind, for optimism may be true to the optimist who is blest with a sound digestion and who is in comfortable circumstances ; but assuredly pessimism is no less true to the unhappy mortals whom Fate has cursed with physical or mental organisations which are unfitted to bear the strain and stress of existence. It is no alleviation of the lot of the unhappy to know that

there is plenty of happiness around them—rather is it an aggravation of their wretchedness.

The success of "The City of Dreadful Night" led to the issue in the following October of "Vane's Story, and other Poems;" and this was followed in 1881 by the publication of a volume of his prose writings under the title of "Essays and Phantasies." These two books, which, with "The City of Dreadful Night," were the only volumes published during the author's lifetime, met with but a moderate measure of success. "Vane's Story," it is true, was, on the whole, favourably reviewed, though some critics, strangely enough, found even more fault with it on account of its anti-theological bias than they had done with the terrible "City." What was surprising, however, was the fact that "Essays and Phantasies," that splendid volume of prose, packed full of keen thought, fine criticism, and admirable writing, provoked scarcely any notice from the leading organs of critical opinion, and was certainly a failure as a publishing venture. Not much more than three hundred copies of the book had been disposed of when, in 1890, the remaining copies, together with the stock of Thomson's other books, were destroyed by fire. Thomson the poet has, up to the present, overshadowed Thomson the prose-writer; but I cannot doubt that justice will ultimately be done to him in both capacities.

Towards the end of June 1880, George Meredith invited Thomson to spend a day with him at his residence at Boxhill. "Last Tuesday," he writes in a letter to me, "I spent with Meredith; a real red-

letter day in all respects. He is one of those personalities who need fear no comparisons with their best writings."

In a letter to me, dated January 5, 1881, he writes :—

"With Mr. Wright and Percy [Holyoake] I went to George Eliot's funeral. It was wretched tramping through the slush, and then standing in the rain for about three-quarters of an hour, with nothing to see but dripping umbrellas. I was disappointed at there being any chapel service at all. At the grave old Dr. Sadler mumbled something, of which only two or three words could be distinguished by us, only a couple of yards behind him."


During the last two years of his life Thomson was frequently at Leicester, where he had many friends, of whom Mr. John Barrs was perhaps the most zealous. With this gentleman he stayed whenever he went there; and in his household Thomson felt himself quite at home. A letter to me dated June 21, 1881, shows that when removed from the depressing surroundings of his life in London, he was still able to shake off the gloom which oppressed him and to enjoy some degree of happiness :—

"We are here four miles from Leicester, with railway station a few minutes off, in a pleasant villa, surrounded by shrubbery, lawn, meadow and kitchen garden. Host and hostess (sister) are kindness itself, as are all other Leicester friends. We lead the most healthy of lives, save for strong temptations to over-

feeding on excellent fare, and host's evil and powerfully contagious habit of sitting up till about 2 A.M. smoking and reading or chatting. I now leave him to his own wicked devices at midnight, or as soon after as possible. Despite the showery weather we have had good drives and walks (country all green and well-wooded), jolly little picnics, and lawn-tennis *ad infinitum*. (N.B.—Lawn-tennis even more than lady's fine pen responsible for the uncouthness of this scrawl.) In brief, we have been so busy with enjoyment that this is the first note I have accomplished (or begun) in the seventeen days. I say *we*, because Adeline [Holyoake] is still here. She leaves about end of week, and I shall then spend a week at Quorndon, where three of Mr. Wright's sons live, managing the factories there. Thence I return here for two or three days, and perhaps shall have two or three with old Mr. Wright in Leicester before homing. You see I mean to have a good holiday before setting to work again."

The reader will perhaps think that the passage I have just quoted is in singular contrast with the general tenour of the present narrative. Yet there is, in truth, no real inconsistency. The nervous and sensitive organisation which rendered Thomson so keenly alive to his unhappy destiny made him respond no less readily to the few gleams of better fortune which now and then visited him. It is no paradox to say that those who suffer the most also enjoy the most, for joy and grief in their highest exaltation

both have their source in the "fine madness" of the poet's brain—or (to speak prosaically) in its excessive sensibility. Thomson's life in London was undoubtedly a somewhat solitary and cheerless one, and the change to the brightness and friendliness of his Leicester hosts could not be otherwise than grateful and cheering to his worn and weary spirit. In London he lodged in one narrow room which was bedroom and sitting-room in one, and in which he could not help feeling a sense of poverty and isolation. A morning spent at the British Museum, an afternoon walk through the streets, and an evening passed in reading or writing—such was the usual course of his daily life in London. Visits to or from his few friends sometimes varied the monotony of his existence; and on rare occasions he would go to a concert or to the opera, for he was passionately fond of music. In London he could not forget his sorrows; in Leicester his friends only allowed him to remember them at intervals. Another service which his stay at Leicester rendered him (in part at least) was the re-awakening of his poetic powers. With the additional stimulus of the recognition of his genius which the publication of his poems had brought, he applied himself once more to the composition of poetry. The best of the pieces which I have placed under the heading of "Last Poems" were written or conceived at Leicester, and when it is considered that amongst them were those fine pieces, "A Voice from the Nile," "Richard Forest's Midsummer Night," "Insomnia," "He heard her Sing," and "The Poet and his Muse,"



it must be allowed that we have cause to be grateful to those friends whose kind attentions made it possible for him to write them. It is greatly to be regretted that his career was now so near its close, for it is certain that his poetical genius was by no means exhausted, but was yet capable of producing fruits equal to anything he had already written, or possibly even of improving upon his finest efforts.

What I have written may possibly have conveyed an idea to the reader's mind that Thomson was somewhat in the habit of posing among his friends as one suffering under the burden of an intolerable fate. Such an idea, however, would be altogether erroneous. He was, on the contrary, rather more than usually reserved about his private affairs ; and his ordinary demeanour gave no hint to those unacquainted or only slightly acquainted with him as to his inward griefs. In the company of friends he was an unusually pleasant companion. He conversed easily and fluently on whatever topic might happen to be started, and frequently gave utterance to a happy jest or an epigrammatic phrase. His wide reading, aided by his tenacious memory, had furnished him with a store of knowledge on a great variety of subjects, and this, supplemented by his practical experience of men and affairs, rendered his conversation unusually interesting and instructive. A man could hardly wish for a better companion than he was ; while as regards women there was a charm about him which invariably made them his friends and admirers.

My narrative has already extended to a much

greater length than I intended, and I must now hasten to a close. Melancholy as the story is throughout, it becomes more and more painful until the end is reached. I have already hinted that Thomson had one great failing which marred all his prospects and destroyed both his mental and bodily health. This was his craving—inherited, there is little doubt—for alcoholic stimulants. That this was a serious flaw in Thomson's character cannot be denied ; but it was one for which he was to be pitied rather than condemned, inasmuch as it was rather a disease than a vice. It is, indeed, a failing to which the literary temperament seems peculiarly liable. A good many instances of this fact will doubtless occur at once to the reader's mind. Genius and intemperance are, it is true, not always linked together ; yet there are many cases on record which seem to show that they are sometimes inseparably connected. We must take our men of genius as we find them—virtues and failings together. It does not become us, who benefit by their gifts, to reproach them with their weaknesses, from which they alone are usually the sufferers. Habitual over-indulgence in strong drink is doubtless reprehensible in all cases ; yet there is a vast difference between the sot who indulges in the practice merely to gratify his sensual appetite, and the unfortunate victim, who, while he yields to an overmastering temptation, yet loathes it and despises himself for giving way to it. Nor must it be forgotten that he who seeks refuge in the Lethe of alcohol when suffering under deep depression of spirits,

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aggravated by insomnia, and additionally tormented because unable to stop the clockwork of the brain from its labour of wild and whirling thought, is but seeking a remedy—a desperate one it may be—for an insupportable evil. In Thomson's case there was every possible excuse for his unhappy failing ; and it was his misfortune and not his fault that he could not conquer it.

As to the course taken by his disease—for such it certainly was—I need not, I think, give more than the briefest possible details. There is no doubt, I believe, that his failing had begun to show itself whilst he was still acting as an army schoolmaster. At first, however, it was only at long intervals that it manifested itself ; but these intervals, as is usually the case, gradually became shorter and shorter, in spite of his ever-earnest efforts at resistance. There were times when he and his friends thought that he had finally conquered in the long struggle with his malady ; but though he might remain free from it for a considerable time, he always succumbed to it at last. Then for a season—sometimes indeed for weeks together—he would be under its baleful influence, and the poet, the man of genius, and the clear and vigorous thinker would sink to a terrible depth of physical and intellectual weakness. To see him when thus afflicted was a most painful sight, and I was sometimes affected almost to tears when I saw him in this condition. I must be excused, however, from dwelling further upon this subject ; let it suffice to say that his malady increased upon him more and more, until it ultimately hastened, if it did not actually cause, his death.

Much might be said about the closing scenes of Thomson's life ; but the subject is far too painful for me to dwell upon. He had now fallen hopelessly under the influence of drink ; and indeed there is good reason to think that he at last yielded himself unresistingly to its temptations, and anticipated eagerly the time when it should finally destroy him. Possibly something might have been done for him if he would have consented to enter a home for inebriates ; but this he declined to do. Under these circumstances it was impossible for his friends to assist him ; and all they could do was to stand helplessly by awaiting the end. How he lived during the last three or four weeks of his existence can only be conjectured, for he had now no longer a regular home, but slept in common lodging-houses. Sometimes, it is to be feared, he was numbered amongst the homeless and shelterless wanderers of the streets. This could not last, of course, and the end came with merciful quickness. On June 1, 1882, Thomson called upon his friend, Philip Bourke Marston, the blind poet, a victim, like himself, to a malign fate. It soon became evident to Marston that Thomson was in a frightful state of mental and physical suffering. Alone with the dying poet, and unable from his blindness to assist him, it may well be imagined that poor Marston passed through a period of terrible distress. At length his friend, the well-known poet and critic, Mr. William Sharp, fortunately arrived. What followed will best be told in Mr. Sharp's own words :—

“ I arrived in the late afternoon and found Marston

in a state of nervous perturbation. Thomson was lying down on the bed in the adjoining room : stooping, I caught his whispered words to the effect that he was dying ; upon which I lit a match, and in the sudden glare beheld his white face on the blood-stained pillow. He had burst one or more blood-vessels, and the hæmorrhage was dreadful. Some time had to elapse before anything could be done, but ultimately, with the help of a friend who came in opportunely, poor Thomson was carried downstairs, and having been placed in a cab, was driven to the adjoining University Hospital. He did not die that night, nor when Philip Marston and I went to see him in the ward the next day was he perceptibly worse, but a few hours after our visit—when his farewell consisted of a startling prophecy which came true—he passed away.”

The prophecy Mr. Sharp alludes to was a declaration that he would leave the hospital on Monday, even if he left it in his coffin. He died on the evening of June 3, 1882, from exhaustion consequent on internal bleeding ; and on the following Monday his body was removed from the hospital as he had predicted. Five days after his death he was buried at Highgate Cemetery, in the grave where his friend Austin Holyoake had been laid to rest eight years before. Many friends were gathered around the grave, amongst whom may be mentioned his brother, John Thomson, Mr. T. R. Wright, Mr. Percy Holyoake, Mr. J. W. Barrs, Miss Barrs, and Philip Bourke Marston. There was, it is needless to say, no reli-

gious ceremony, but Mr. Wright read an adaptation of the Secular Burial Service, which Austin Holyoake had composed for such occasions, and afterwards delivered an eloquent and feeling tribute to the virtues of the man and the genius of the poet.

Thus ended the career of James Thomson, a career than which there is no sadder recorded amongst the many sad records of the lives of our poets. He resembled the princess in the story on whom the good fairies bestowed many good gifts, which were all rendered nugatory by the one evil gift of the bad fairy. A bright and searching intellect, splendid imaginative powers, the faculty of penetrating to the heart of things, emotions tremblingly alive to all impressions of natural beauty or human loveliness, intense admiration for all kinds of noble and heroic conduct—all these fine qualities were rendered useless to him by the one evil gift—

“The melencolia that transcends all wit”—

with which fate had burdened him. Yet no! such gifts as these could not be rendered useless, though they might be prevented from shining forth in their full lustre. The priceless gift of genius—that rare endowment which so few possess, and which it is given to so few to understand or appreciate—did, after all, in a great degree compensate him for his otherwise melancholy fate. The misfortune which befell him in the loss of his beloved is by no means an uncommon occurrence, and befalls many persons who have not his source of consolation. It is a real

VANE'S STORY

VANE'S STORY

PROLOGUE.

THIS is the story
(To God be the glory !)
Which Vane, found in bed
When a splash of fierce red
From the sunset made strange
The street's opposite range,
Told me ; who, astonished,
Had firstly admonished,
Then asked him outright,
"On the spree all last night ?"
Pale looked he, and queer ;
But his speech calm and clear,
And his voice, sweet and strong,
So swayed me ere long,
That I almost or quite
Believed him that night.
He named not the hall
Where he went to the ball ;

Of his friends I could trace
None who knew of the case,
Nor the Jones, nor the Brown—
There are myriads in town !
The landlord avows
He went out with his spouse
After tea ; slept at Bow,
At her sister's.

And so,
Shall we trust Vane ? or deem
Him the dupe of a dream ?
Let who will decide.
The next week he died,
And thus ended his story.
(To God be the glory !)

THE STORY.

ONE flamelet flickered to and fro
Above the clear vermilion glow ;
The house was silent, and the street
Deserted by all echoing feet ;
And that small restless tongue of light
Possest my ear and mocked my sight,
While drowsy, happy, warm, I lay
* Upon the couch at close of day,

* Here for decorum be it said,
This couch was sofa and not bed.

And drowsy, dreamy, more and more,
I floated from the twilight shore
Over the vague vast sea of sleep,
Just conscious of the rest so deep ;
Not sinking to the under caves,
But rocking on the surface waves.
When fitfully some muffled sound
Came from the crowded streets around,
It brought no thought of restless life
With wakeful care and passionate strife ;
But seemed the booming of a bell
Sweetly ringing tumult's knell,
Slowly chiming far away
The euthanasia of the day.
And then unsummoned by my will
Came floating through this mood so still
The scenes of all my life's past range,
In perfect pictures, fair and strange,
As flowers limned in purest light
Upon a background such as might
Expand beneath some forest-screen
After the sunset, goldbrowngreen.
And then I heard on every side
The shadowy rustling slow and wide
Of night's dim curtains softly drawn
To hush the world asleep till dawn.
I heard the rustling, and my eyes
Were curtained with the curtained skies ;

And I lay wrapt as in a fleece
Of warmth and purity and peace ;
While consciousness within the stream
Of rippling thought and shadowy dream
Sank slowly to the deepest deep,
Lured by the murmuring Siren, sleep ;
When suddenly a little thrill
Of splendour pricked both mind and will,
And brought me tidings grand and strange ;
I did not stir with outward change,
But felt with inward royal mirth,
On all this dusk of heaven and earth
The moon may rise or not to-night ;
But in my soul she rises bright !

The globe of glory swelling rose
In mighty pulses, solemn throes ;
And filled and overfilled me soon
With light and music, with the swoon
Of too much rapture and amaze,
A murmurous hush, a luminous haze.
How long in this sweet swoon I lay,
What hours or years, I cannot say ;
Vast arcs of the celestial sphere
Subtend such little angles here.
But after the ineffable,
This first I can remember well :

A Rose of Heaven, so dewy-sweet
Its fragrance was a soul complete,
Came, touched my brow, caressed my lips,
And then my eyes in their eclipse ;
And still I stirred not, though there came
A wine of fire through all my frame,
An ecstasy of joy and love,
A vision of the throne above,
A myriad-voiced triumphant psalm
Upswelling through a splendour calm ;
Then suddenly, as if a door
Were shut, veiled silence as before.

The sweetest voice said, " True it is !
He does not waken at my kiss ! "

I smiled : " Your kisses three and four
Just gave me Heaven, no less, no more ;
I held me still, eyes shut, lest bliss
Should overflow and waste a kiss."

Then dreamily my lids I raised,
And with grand joy, small wonder, gazed,
Although the miracle I saw
Might well have made me wan with awe.
" Why have you left your golden hair,
These gorgeous dusky braids to wear ?
Why have you left your azure eyes,
To gaze through deep dark mysteries ?

Why have you left your robe of white,
And come in cloudy lace bedight?
Or did you think that I could fail
To know you through whatever veil?
As bird or beast, as fish or worm,
In fiendish or angelic form,
As flower or tree, as wave or stone,
Be sure I recognise My Own!"

The sweet sad voice was sad no more,
But sweeter, tenderer, than before;
"Oh, ask no questions yet," said she,
"But answer me, but answer me.

"I now have listened very long
To catch some notes of that great song
Your youth began to sing so well;
Oh, why have none yet reached me? tell!"
"And why is any lamp not bright,
With no more oil to feed its light?
Why does a robe moth-eaten fade
When she is gone whom it arrayed?
Great songs must pulse with lifeful breath,
No hymns mark time for timeless death;
One long keen wail above the bier,
Then smothered moans, then stillness drear."

"I long have listened, all aflame,
For some full echoes of the fame

Youth pledged ripe manhood to achieve :
Why must I, hearing none, still grieve ? ”
“ And why should he who cannot spend
Not make of gold his life's chief end ?
O Love, the jewels of renown,
So priceless in a monarch's crown,
What are they when his realm is lost,
And he must wander like a ghost
Alone through wilds of rocky dearth,
But pretty pebbles nothing worth ?
And would you have our love's proclaim
In shouts and trumpet-peals of fame ;
Or whispered as I whisper here,
Into this little pink-shell ear
Still full of echoes from the sea
Of fathomless Eternity ? ”

“ I do not seek thy fame because
Enamoured of the world's applause,
Though even its most reckless shout
Involves some true love-praise no doubt :
But, Dearest, when fame's trumpets blare
Great hearts are battling with despair :
Better the tumult of the strife
Than stillness of lone-wasting life.
If you were working out God's will,
Could all the air around be still ? ”

“ But I am working out God's will
Alike when active and when still ;
And work we good or work we ill,
We never work against His will. . . .
All work, work, work ! Why must we toil
For ever in the hot turmoil ?
God wrought six days, and formed the world ;
Then on the seventh His power refurled,
And felt so happy that He blest
That Sabbath day above the rest ;
And afterwards, we read, He cursed
The work He thought so good at first ;
And surely Earth and Heaven evince
That He has done but little since.

* “ Well, I, who am a puny man,
And not a God who all things can,
Have also worked : not six short days
Of work refulgent with self-praise,
Of work ‘all-good,’ whose end was blest
With infinite eternal rest :
No, I have worked life after life
Of sorrow, sufferance and strife,
So many ages, that I ask
To rest one lifetime from the task,

* The last chapter of George Sand's *Lélia* may seem to be the source of the following section : in fact, however, I chanced to read that work just after, and not before, this section was written.

To spend these years (forlorn of thee)
Sequestered in passivity ;
Observing all things God hath made,
And of no ugliest truth afraid,
But having leisure time enough
To look at both sides of the stuff. . . .
With Shelley to his ocean-doom,
With Dante to his alien tomb ;
With Wallace, Raleigh, Sidney, Vane,
All to the axe's bloody stain ;
With Socrates until the cup
Of hemlock lifted calmly up,
With Jesus to the fatal tree
After the garden's agony,
With Mohammed in flight and fight,
With Burns in all his fate's deep night,
With Joan to the fiery screen,
With Charlotte to the guillotine,
With Campanella all the while
And Tasso in their dungeons vile,
With Swift slow-dying from the top,
With Rabelais to the curtain's drop,
Cervantes prisoner and slave,
Columbus on the unknown wave,
And Luther through his lifelong war ;
With these, and with how many more,
Since poor Eve fell, and as she fell
Of course pulled Adam down as well,—

In these, and in how many more,
Have I outbattled life's stern war,
Endured all hardships, toiled and fought,
Oppressed, sore-wounded, and distraught,
While inwardly consumed with thought ;
How long ! how long !—Mankind no whit
The better for the whole of it !
And I, look at me, do I need
The little rest I claim, indeed,
With body dwindled, brain outworn,
Soul's pith dried up, and heart forlorn ? . . .
And so I rest me, half-content
That all my active power is spent :
No new campaign till after cure !
Meanwhile I passively endure
The wounds bequeathed by so much strife,
The hopelessness of present life :
And this is much ; what further can
Be looked for from a wreck of man ?
I bear in silence and alone
What maddened me at first, I own."

*"The wounds bequeathed by so much strife,
The hopelessness of present life."*
She dwelt upon these words again
With such a look of wistful pain
As made my heart all creep and stir
With pity, not for self, for her.

"O my true love!" she said (the while
Her poor lips sought and failed to smile),
"O love! your laugh is like a knell;
Your phantasy is horrible,
Thus calmly plunged a glittering knife
Into the core of your own life!"
And there she broke down; all the grief,
Love, pity powerless for relief,
Yearning to suffer in my stead,
Revulsion against fatal dread,
Long swelling mighty in her soul
O'erflooded now beyond control.
She gave a little laughing cry,
Choked sharply off; then heavily
Flung herself down upon my breast
With passionate weeping unrepent;
A night-dark cloud upon some bleak
And thunder-furrowed mountain peak
Pouring itself in rain and fire;
For now through all the black attire
Heaving about her heaving frame
Fermented flashes of swift flame;
Not tempest-lightnings, but indeed
Auroral splendours such as speed
Battling with gloom before the day,
And herald its triumphant sway.
Her instincts in that mighty hour
Of insurrection grasped at power;

And her true self arrayed in light,
Azure and golden, dazzling-bright,
Was struggling through the mask of night.

The mask remained,—for some good cause
Well emphasised by Heavenly laws ;
She sobbed herself to self-control,
Repress the heavings of her soul ;
Then stood up, pallid, faint, distraught,
Facing some phantom of dread thought.

“ Another spasm like this,” I said,
“ Will kill me ! When we both are dead
I’ll use my very first new breath
To thank you for the blissful death,
The torture-rapture utterless,
You dear life-giving murderess ! ”
I laughed ; and yet the while I gazed
Upon her standing wan and dazed :
Would I had bitten out my tongue
Ere any word of mine had stung
With such an unforeboded smart
That purest and most loving heart !

“ And do you never kneel and pray
For comfort on your lonely way ?
And have you no firm trust in God
To lighten your so-heavy load ? ”

The voice how strange and sad ! the mien
How troubled from its pure serene !
“ You good Child ! I beseech no more
That one and one may make up four,
When one and one are my assets
And four the total of my debts :
Nor do I now with fervour pray
To cast no shadow in broad day :
Nor even ask (as I asked once)
That laws sustaining worlds and suns
In their eternal path should be
Suspended, that to pleasure me
Some flower I love,—now drooping dead,
May be empowered to lift its head.”

“ Ah, good pure souls have told me how
You laughed at prayer as you laugh now,
And turned all holy things to mirth,
And made a mock of heaven and earth ;
And sometimes seemed to have no faith
In God, in true life after death.”
“ But God exists, or not, indeed,
Quite irrespective of our creed ;
We live, or live not, after death,
Alike whatever be our faith ;
And not a single truth, in brief,
Is modified by our belief.

And if God *does* subsist and act,
Though some men cannot learn the fact,
Who but Himself has made mankind,
Alike the seers and the blind ?
It may be that for some good cause
He loves to rest deep-veiled in laws ;
And better likes us who don't ask
Or seek to get behind the mask,
Than those our fellow-insect fry
Who creep and hop and itch and pry,
The Godhead's lice, the swarming fleas
In Jove's great bed of slumbrous ease ? ”

“ They said you scorned all wise restraints,
And loved the sinners, not the saints ;
And mocking these, still dwelt with those
The friends who are the worst of foes. ”

“ They told you something like the truth,
These dear tale-bearers full of ruth.
How proffer mere coarse human love
To hearts sole-set on things above ?
And furthermore, although of old
Wolves ravaged dreadfully the fold,
Yet now Christ's tender lambs indeed
Securely frisk, unstinted feed.
To us poor goats they freely give
The dreariest tracts, but they—they live

In pastures green, by rivers clear,
Quite sleek and happy even here :
And when these lambs that frisk and leap
Are all staid, stout, and well-clothed sheep,
The shepherd, having taken stock,
Will lead away the whole white flock
To bleat and batten in galore
Of Heavenly clover evermore !
The dear saints want no earthly friend,
Having their Jesus : but, perpend ;
What of the wild goats ? what of us,
A hundred times more numerous,
Poor devils, starving wretched here
On barren tracts and wild rocks drear,
And in the next life (as they tell)
Roasted eternally in Hell ? ”

“ But when you join the multitude
Of sinners, is it for their good ;
To hale them from the slough of sin,
Or but to plunge your own soul in ? ”
“ And what they are, must I not be ?
The dear Lord made them Who made me ?
If God *did* make us, this is sure,
We all are brothers, vile and pure.
I've known some brilliant saints who spent
Their lives absorbed in one intent,

Salvation each of his own soul ;
The race they ran had just one goal,
And just one modest little prize,
A wicket gate in Paradise,
A sneaking-in there through the wall
To bliss eternal ; that was all.
Some of them thought this bliss would too
Be spiced by the contrasting view
Of Hell beneath them surging crammed
With all the tortures of the damned.
Their alms were loans to poor God lent,
Interest infinity-per-cent.,
(And God must be hard-up indeed
If of such loans He stands in need) ;
Their earnest prayers were coward cries,
Their holy doctrines blasphemies ;
Their faith, hope, love, no more, no less,
Than sublimated selfishness.

“ Now my gross, earthly, human heart
With man and not with God takes part ;
With men, however vile, and not
With seraphim I cast my lot :
With those poor ruffian thieves, too strong
To starve amidst our social wrong,
And yet too weak to wait and earn
Dry bread by honest labour stern ;

With those poor harlots steeping sin
 And shame and woe in vitriol-gin :
 Shall these, so hardly dealt with here,
 Be worse off in a future sphere ;
 And I, a well-fed loungeur, seek
 To 'cut' them dead, to cringe and sneak
 Into that bland *beau monde* the sky,
 Whose upper circles are so high ? . .
 If any human soul at all
 Must die the second death, must fall
 Into that gulph of quenchless flame
 Which keeps its victims still the same,
 Unpurified as unconsumed,
 To everlasting torments doomed ;
 Then I give God my scorn and hate,
 And turning back from Heaven's gate
 (Suppose me got there !) bow, *Adieu !*
Almighty Devil, damn me too !" *

As lightnings from dusk summer skies,
 Mirth dazzled from her brow and eyes ;
 A charming chiming silvery laughter
 Accompanied my speech, and after

* This was written before Mr. J. S. Mill published a similar declaration. It will be noticed, however, that while the philosopher treated the matter with his habitual lofty earnestness, the flippancy rhymester but makes it a subject for mockery and laughter.

Still tinkled when the speech was done
 Its symphony of faëry fun :
 And then her lips superbly smiled.
 " *You* are the child, the naughty child,
 Screaming and kicking on its back,
 And choking with convulsions black,
 At these old-bogey tales of Hell
 Its hard-pressed priestly nurses tell !"
 And gaylier, sweetlier yet she laughed,
 Till I was drunken, dizzy, daft.
 " You wicked holy one ! " I cried,
 " You changeling seraph ! you black-eyed
 Black-hearted scoffer ! Heaven itself
 Has only made you worse, mad elf,

* * * *

* * *

* * * *

Well, I confess that I deserve
 Your arrowy laugh, your lip's grand curve,
 For foaming out in such a rage
 Of boyish nonsense at my age,
 Anent this stupid Hell and Heaven
 Some half-believe one day in seven.
 Let all who stickle for a Hell
 Have it ; they deserve it well. . . .
 Not often in these latter years
 Am I, my darling, moved to tears,

Or joyous laughter or hot scorn,
While plodding to the quiet bourne ;
'Tis you have brought me back a part
Of my old youthful passionate heart."

"And do you feel no bitter grief
Of penitence for unbelief?
No stings of venomous remorse
In tracing backward to its source
This wicked godless lifetime's course?"

"I half remember, years ago,
Fits of despair that maddened woe,
Frantic remorse, intense self-scorn,
And yearnings harder to be borne
Of utter loneliness forlorn ;
What passionate secret prayers I prayed !
What futile firm resolves I made !
As well a thorn might pray to be
Transformed into an olive-tree ;
As well a weevil might determine
To grow a farmer hating vermin ;
The *I am that I am* of God
Defines no less a worm or clod.
My penitence was honest guile ;
My inmost being all the while
Was laughing in a patient mood
At this externe solicitude,

Was waiting laughing till once more
I should be sane as heretofore ;
And in the pauses of the fits
That rent my heart and scared my wits,
Its pleasant mockery whispered through,
Oh, what can Saadi have to do
With penitence ? and what can you ?
Are Shiraz roses wreathed with rue ?

“Now tell me, ere once more we turn
To things which us alone concern,
Of all the prosperous saints you see
Has none a kindly word for me ?”
“First SHELLEY, parting for above,
Left you a greeting full of love.”

“The burning Seraph of the Throne !
Not for my worship deep and lone
Of him, but for my love of you,
He loves and greets me ; in his view
I stand all great and glorified,
The bridegroom worthy of the bride
For whom the purest soul in Heaven
Might wait and serve long lifetimes seven,
And other seven when these were past,
Nor deem the service long at last,
Though after all he failed for ever
In his magnificent endeavour.”

“Then that dear Friend of yours, who came
Uncouthly shrinking, full of shame,
Hopeless and desolate, at first,
Dismayed that he was not accurst ;
But when his essence shone out clear
Was found the noblest of our sphere ;
Beautiful, faithful, valiant, wise,
With tenderest love that may suffice
When once with equal power unfurled
To sway and bless a whole bad world :
Is it for my own sake that *he*
Bows down, Sir, half-adoring me ?”

“The great deep heart of purest gold,
Ever o'erflowing as of old
From the eternal source divine
With Heaven's most rich and cordial wine !
Enough : the loneliest on earth,
Famishing in affection's dearth,
Who found but two such friends above
Would banquet evermore on love.”

“Now ask me what you wish to ask ;
Your slave is eager for her task.”
“Then, firstly, I, who never mix
With our vile nether politics,
Have also ceased for many years
To study those of your high spheres.

Who now is, under God and Fate,
The Steward of the world-estate,
The Grand Vizier, Prime Minister,
Or (if you will) sole Manager
Of this bewildering Pantomime
Whose scenes and acts fill Space and Time?"

"I have heard many and many a name ;
The laws seem evermore the same,
The operation of the laws
Reveals no variance in the cause."

"A learned politician, you !
Well, any name perchance will do ;
And we will take an old one, say
That Demiurgos still bears sway.
I want a prayer to reach his throne,
And you can bear it, you alone ;
For neither God nor fiend nor man
(Nay, scarcely any woman) can
Resist that voice of tenderest pleading,
Or turn away from it unheeding.
Not in this mystic mask of night,
But in your dazzling noonday light ;
Not with this silent storm of hair,
But crowned with sunbeams you shall fare,
Not with these darkest Delphian eyes,
But with your luminous azure skies ;

For powers of solemn awe and gloom
Love loveliness and joy and bloom.
Only your voice you must not change ;
It is not, where all else is, strange ;
The sweetest voice in all the world,
The soul of cosmic music furled
In such a little slender sound,
Delighting in its golden bound ;
The evening star of melody,
The morning star of harmony ;
When I can catch its faintest tone
In sighing breeze, in dim wave's moan,
I feel you near, my Love, my Own."

"And who shall guide me to the throne
Whose place is unto all unknown ?"
"By one at least the path is known :
* To Demogorgon's awful throne,
Down, down, through all the mysteries
He led the Oceanides :
Where Demogorgon dwelleth deep
There Demiurgos watch doth keep,
Though Vesta sleeps æonian sleep :
SHELLEY himself shall be your guide,
Since I must still on earth abide :
Down, down, into the deepest deep ;
Down, down, and through the shade of sleep ;

* *Prometheus Unbound*, act ii., scene 3, *et seq.*

Down, down, beyond the cloudy strife
Of interwoven death and life ;
Down, down, unto the central gloom
Whose darkness radiates through the tomb
And fills the universal womb.

“ Then he shall leave thee lonely there,
And thou shalt kneel and make thy prayer,
A childish prayer for simple boon :
That soon and soon and very soon
Our Lady of Oblivious Death
May come and hush my painful breath,
And bear me thorough Lethe-stream,
Sleeping sweet sleep without a dream ;
And bring you also from that sphere
Where you grow sad without me, Dear ;
And bear us to her deepest cave
Under the Sea without a wave,
Where the eternal shadows brood
In the Eternal Solitude,
Stirring never, breathing never,
Silent for ever and for ever ;
And side by side and face to face,
And linked as in a death-embrace,
Leave us absorbing thus the balm
Of most divinely perfect calm,
Till ten full years have overflowed
For each wherein we bore the load

Of heavy life upon this earth
From birth to death from death to birth :
That when this cycle shall be past
We may wake young and pure at last,
And both together recommence
The life of passion, thought and sense,
Of fear and hope, of woe and bliss ;—
But in another world than this.

“ For I am infinitely tired
With this old sphere we once admired,
With this old earth we loved too well ;
Disgusted more than words can tell,
And would not mind a change of Hell.
The same old solid hills and leas,
The same old stupid patient trees,
The same old ocean blue and green,
The same sky cloudy or serene ;
The old two-dozen hours to run
Between the settings of the sun,
The old three hundred sixty-five
Dull days to every year alive ;
Old stingy measure, weight and rule,
No margin left to play the fool ;
The same old way of getting born
Into it naked and forlorn,
The same old way of creeping out
Through death's low door for lean and stout ;

Same men with the old hungry needs,
Puffed up with the old windy creeds ;
Old toil, old care, old worthless treasures,
Old gnawing sorrows, swindling pleasures :
The cards are shuffled to and fro,
The hands may vary somewhat so,
The dirty pack's the same we know
Played with long thousand years ago ;
Played with and lost with still by Man,—
Fate marked them ere the game began ;
I think the only thing that's strange
Is our illusion as to change.

“This is the favour I would ask :
Can you submit to such a task ?”

“All you have told me I will do,
Rejoicing to give joy to you :
Oh, I will plead, will win the boon,
That we may be united soon. . . .
But sameness palls upon you so,
That to relieve you I will go.”

“By no means ! wait a little, Dear !
The change is in your being here.
Besides, I have not finished yet—
How stupid of me to forget !
Sh ! I shall think of it just now. . . .
Your kiss, my Angel, on my brow !

Your kiss that through the dullest pain
Flashed inspiration on my brain !”

Her face was fulgent with clear bliss ;
She bent down o'er me with the kiss
As bends a dawn of golden light
To kiss away the earth's long night.
The splendour of her beauty made
Me blind, and in the rapturous shade
From head to foot my being thrilled
As if with mighty music filled,
To feel that kiss come leaning down
Upon me like a radiant crown.
Her royal kiss was on my brow
A burning ruby, burning now
As then, and burning evermore ;
A Star of Love above the roar
And fever of this life's long war :
And suddenly my brain was bright
With glowing fire and dancing light,
A rich intoxicating shine
Like wave on wave of noble wine,
The Alcahest of joy supreme
Dissolving all things into dream.

So when at length I found a tongue,
Bell-clear and bold my voice outrung :

“Dearest, all thanks were out of place
For this thine overwhelming grace.
The kiss of tenderness, the kiss
Of truth, you gave me erst ; but this
Is consecration ; to the man
Who wears this burning talisman
The veil of Isis melts away
To woven air, the night is day,
That he alone in all the shrine
May see the lineaments divine :
And fate the marble Sphinx, dumb, stern,
Terror of Beauty cold, shall yearn
And melt to flesh, and blood shall thrill
The stony heart, and life shall fill
The statue : it shall follow him
Submissive to his every whim,
Ev’n as the lion of the wild
Followed pure Una, meek and mild.

“Now, I can tell you what we two
Before we part this night will do.
There is a dance—I wish it were
Some brilliant night-fête rich and rare,
With gold-and-scarlet uniforms
Far-flashing through the music-storms ;
Some Carnival’s last Masquerade,
Wherein our parts were fitly played.

This is another sort of thing,
The mere tame weekly gathering
Of humble tradesmen, lively clerks,
And fair ones who befit such sparks :
Few merry meetings could look duller ;
No wealth, no grandeur, no rich colour.
Yet they enjoy it : give a girl
Some fiddle-screach to time her twirl,
And give a youth the limpest waist
That wears a gown to hold embraced ;
Then dance, dance, dance ! both girl and boy
Are overbrimmed and drunk with joy ;
Because young hearts to love's own chime
Beat passionate rhythms all the time.

“ This is the night, and we will go,
For many of the *Class* I know ;
Young friendly fellows, rather rough,
But frank and kind and good enough
For this bad world : how all will stare
To see me with a dark Queen there !
I went last winter twice or thrice,
As dull as lead, as cold as ice,
Amidst the flushed and vivid crowd
Of youths and maidens laughing loud ;
For thought retraced the long sad years
Of pallid smiles and frozen tears

Back to a certain festal night,
A whirl and blaze of swift delight,
When we together danced, we two !
I live it all again ! . . . Do you
Remember how I broke down quite
In the mere polka ? . . . Dressed in white,
A loose pink 'sash around your waist,
Low shoes across the instep laced,
Your moonwhite shoulders glancing through
Long yellow ringlets dancing too,
You were an angel then ; as clean
From earthly dust-speck, as serene
And lovely and beyond my love,
As now in your far world above.

“ You shall this night a few more hours
Be absent from your heavenly bowers ;
With leave or not, 'tis all the same,
I keep you here and bear the blame.
Your Star this night must take its chance
Without you in the spheral dance,
For you shall waltz and whirl with me
Amidst a staidier companie ;
The Cherubim and Seraphim
And Saintly Hosts may drown their hymn
With tenfold noise of harp and lyre ;
The sweetest voice of all the quire

Shall sing to me, shall make my room,
This little nutshellful of gloom,
A Heaven of Heavens, the best of all,
While I am dressing for the Ball ! . . .

“What book is this I held before,
The gloaming glooming more and more,
Eyes dreamed and hand drooped on the floor?
The *Lieder*—Heine’s—what we want !
A lay of Heine’s you shall chant ;
Our poor Saint Heinrich ! for he was
A saint here of the loftiest class,
By martyrdom more dreadly solemn
Than that of Simeon on the column.
God put him to the torture ; seven
Long years beneath unpitying heaven,
The body dead, the man at strife
With all the common cares of life :
A living Voice intense and brave
Issuing from a Mattress-grave.
At length the cruel agony wrung
Confessions from that haughty tongue ;
Confessions of the strangest, more
Than ever God had bargained for ;
With prayers and penitential psalms
That gave the angels grinning qualms,
With jests when sharp pangs cut too deep
That made the very devils weep.

Enough of this ! the Monarch cried ;
Fear gave what mercy still denied ;
Torture committed suicide
To quench that voice ; the victim died
Victorious over Heaven and Doom ;
The Mattress-grave became a tomb
Deep in our Mother's kindly womb,
Oblivion tranced the painful breath,
The Death-in-Life grew perfect Death."

" Is it the mere quaint German type,
Or is it from some blackened pipe ?
The volume seems, without a joke,
A volume of tobacco-smoke ! "

" The choice is difficult in sooth ;
But sing that song of love and ruth
The Princess Ilse sang his youth :
And sing it very softly sweet,
As not to ravish all the street ;
And sing it to what air you will,
Your voice in any tune must thrill. . . .
Yet stay, there was a certain hymn
Which used at Sunday School to brim
Our hearts with holy love and zeal,
Our eyes with tears they yearned to feel :
Mild Bishop Heber shall embrace
Wild Heine by sweet music's grace,

The while you sing the verses fair
To *Greenland's icy mountains'* air ;
A freezing name ! but icy mountains
Were linked with *Afric's* sunny fountains."

*Ich bin die Prinsessin Ilse,
Und wohne im Ilsenstein ;
Komm mit nach meinem Schlosse,
Wir wollen selig sein.*

"Dear Princess, I will come with thee
Into thy cavern's mystery,
And both of us shall happy be."

*In meinen weissen Armen,
An meiner weissen Brust,
Da sollst du liegen und träumen
Von alter Märchenlust.*

"In your white arms, on your white breast,
I'll lie and dream in perfect rest,
With more than faëry blessings blest."

*Es bleiben todt die Todten,
Und nur der Lebendige lebt ;
Und ich bin schön und blühend,
Mein lachendes Herze bebt.*

"Yes, dead the dead for ever lie ;
But you my Love and your Love I
Are of the souls that cannot die."

*Doch dich soll mein Arm umschlingen,
 Wie er Kaiser Heinrich umschlang ;—
 Ich hielt ihm zu die Ohren,
 Wenn die Trompet erklang.*
 "Roll drum, plead lute, blare trumpet-call ;
 Our ears shall be fast closed to all
 Beneath divine Oblivion's pall."

Oh what a quaintly coupled pair
 The poem and the music were !
 The Sunday School's old simple air,
 The heathen verses rich and rare !

Wan ghosts have risen from the grave
 To flit across the midnight wave ;
 Pale phantoms started from the tomb
 To hurry through the wildwood gloom ;
 Cold corpses left their wormy bed
 To mingle in high feasts, 'tis said ;
 But never since old Noah's flood
 Turned Eden into sand and mud,
 (Relieving thus the Heavenly guard
 From its long spell of duty hard ?) *

* The Holy Bible unfortunately tells us nothing of this. Readers may, however, refer to our auxiliary Bible, "Paradise Lost," Book xi., Michael's prophecy of the Flood. But Milton was really too careless about the fate of the guard. Was it recalled in time, or did it perish at its post ? Did the deluge sweep over that gate, "With dreadful faces thronged, and fiery arms ?" Let us hope not. It would be sad to think that the "flaming

Has any Angel left the sphere
Of Heaven to dance with mortals here :
Though earthly angels crowd each ball,
Since women are such angels all.

My partner was no icy corse,
No phantom of a wild remorse,
No Lamia of delirious dream,
No nymph of forest, sea, or stream :
A soul of fire, a lovely form
Lithe to the dance and breathing warm ;
A face that flushed with cordial pleasure,
Dove-feet that flew in perfect measure ;
A little hand so soft and fine,
Whose touch electric thrilled through mine ;
A heart that beat against my breast
Full pulses of triumphant zest ;
Deep eyes, pure eyes, as dark as night,
Yet full of liquid love and light
When their moon-soul came floating through
The clouds of mystery into view,
And myriad star-rays glittering keen
Were tempered in its mystic sheen ;

sword" was extinguished with a hiss ; and that the " Cherubim " were drowned like the other animals, without even the salvation of a single live specimen in the Ark. Probably, however, being abundantly and superabundantly furnished with wings, they all flew away to Heaven when the waters began sweeping the Mount of Paradise " Down the great river to the opening gulf."

Soft lips full curved in ruddy glow,
And swift as young Apollo's bow,—
What arrowy laughters flashing free
With barbs of pleasant mockery
Pierced through and through the whirling rout,
And let thought in where life flew out,
And made the world a happy dream
“Where nothing is, but all things seem !”

The splendid beauty of her face,
Her dancing's proud and passionate grace,
Her soul's eternal life intense
Lavishly poured through every sense,
Intoxicated all the air,
Inspiring every dancer there :
Never again shall that old Hall
Spin round with such another Ball ;
The human whirlwind might have whirled
It through the heights of air and hurled
It down at last into the sea,
Nor yet disturbed the revelry.
The violin and the violoncello,
The flute that withered little fellow,
The red-faced cornet always mellow,
Our noble Orchestra of four,
Played as they never played of yore,
Played as they will play nevermore,

As if the rushing air were cloven
By all the legions of Beethoven.

In one of the eternal trances
(Five minutes long) between two dances,
The Brown whom one meets everywhere
Came smug and grinning to me there,
And "May I have the pleasure,—honour?"
A glance (encouraging) upon her.

"My dear good Brown, you understand
This lady's from a foreign land,
And does not comprehend a word
You speak so well: nay, I have heard
That one may search all England through,
And not find twenty scholars who
Can speak or write her language clearly,
Though once our great men loved it dearly.
The little of it I know still
(Read well, write badly, speak so ill!)
I first learnt many years ago
From her, and one you do not know,
A restless wanderer, one of these
You call damned doubtful refugees,
Enthusiasts, whom while harboured here
All proper folk dislike and fear."

Brown muttered, "I've a little knowledge
Of French,—the Working Man's New College."

"Ah, yes ; your French is doubtless good,
 And French we know is understood
 By polished people everywhere ;
 But then her land, though rich and fair,
 Lies far beyond the continents
 Of civilised accomplishments ;
 And she could sooner learn to speak
 Persian or Sanskrit, Norse or Greek,
 Than this delightful brilliant witty
 Tongue of delightful Paris city,
 *(' *The devils' paradise, the hell*
Of angels,—Heine loved it well !).
 And finally, my dearest Brown,
 The customs of her folk would frown
 Austere rebukes on her if she
 Dared dance with any one but me !"

* " Mich ruft der Tod. . . .

Glaub mir, mein Kind, mein Weib, Mathilde,
 Nicht so gefährlich ist das wilde
 Erzürrte Meer und der trotzige Wald,
 Als unser jetzige Aufenthalt !
 Wie schrecklich auch der Wolf und der Geier,
 Haifische und sonstige Meerungeheuer :
 Viel grimmere, schlimmere Bestien enthält
 Paris, die leuchtende Hauptstadt der Welt,
 Das singende, springende, schöne Paris,
Die Hölle der Engel, der Teufel Paradies—
 Das ich dich hier verlassen soll,
 Das macht mir verrückt, das macht mir toll !"

LETZTE GEDICHTE : *Babylonische Sorgen.*

The title suggests, and may have been specially suggested by,

Brown went and whispered strange remarks
 To eager girls and staring clerks. . . .
 We are caught up and swept away
 In the cyclone-gallop's sway
 And round and round and round and round
 Go whirling in a storm of sound.

But in the next brief perfect trance
 That followed the impassioned dance,
 The Jones whom one too rarely sees
 Came rushing on me like a breeze :
 "What miracle ! what magic might !—
 But have you seen yourself to-night ?"

"Oh yes ! twin-mirrored in the skies
 Of these my Lady's glorious eyes !

that great verse of Jeremiah li. 7 : " Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken : the nations have drunken of her wine ; therefore the nations are mad."

So Béranger, in his *Jean de Paris* :

" Quel amour incroyable,
 Maintenant et jadis,
 Pour ces murs dont le diable
 A fait son paradis !"

And he who knew his Paris best, Balzac the Terrible : " Cette succursale de l'enfer."—*Melmoth Reconcilié*.

Again, " Paris a été nommé un enfer. Tenez ce mot pour vrai."—*La Fille aux Yeux d'or*. (*Histoire des Treize*.)

And yet again, " Ce Paris qualifié d'antichambre de l'enfer."—*Balzac, to the Abbé Eglé*.

In our rude days of kingly fear,
If any monarch drawing near
The palace saw so bright and clear
His picture in the windows shine,
He well might say, *Auspicious sign*
That still this noble home is mine !"

"But you are half as tall again,
And stately as a King of Men ;
And in the prime of health and youth,
Younger by twenty years, in sooth ;
Your face, the pale and sallow, glows
As fresh as any morning rose ;
Your voice rings richly as a bell,
Resonant as a trumpet-swell ;
Your dull and mournful dreamy eyes
Now dazzle, burn, and mesmerise :
Thus gazed, thus spoke, thus smiled, thus trod,
Apollo the immortal God !"

"Dear Jones, as usual, you are right ;
I stand revealed Myself to-night,
The God of Poesy, Lord of Light. . . .
But you would learn now whence the change :
Listen ; it is and is not strange.

"There was a Fountain long ago,
A fountain of perpetual flow,

Whose purest springlets had their birth
Deep in the bosom of the earth.
Its joyous wavering silvery shaft
To all the beams of morning laughed,
Its steadfast murmurous crystal column
Was loved by all the moonbeams solemn ;
From morn to eve it fell again
A singing many-jewelled rain,
From eve to morn it charmed the hours
With whispering dew and diamond showers ;
Crowned many a day with sunbows bright,
With moonbows halo'd many a night ;
And so kept full its marble urn,
All fringed with fronds of greenest fern,
O'er which with timeless love intent
A pure white marble Goddess leant :
And overflowing aye the urn
In rillets that became a burn,
It danced adown the verdant slope
As light as youth, as gay as hope,
And 'wandered at its own sweet will ;'
And here it was a lakelet still,
And there it was a flashing stream ;
And all about it was a dream
Of beauty, such a Paradise
As rarely blooms beneath our skies ;
The loveliest flowers, the grandest trees,
The broadest glades, the fairest leas ;

And double music tranced the hours,—
The countless perfumes of the flowers,
The countless songs of swift delight
That birds were singing day and night.

“ But suddenly there fell a change ;
So suddenly, so sad, so strange !
The fountain ceased to wave its lance
Of silver to the spheral dance ;
The runnels were no longer fed,
And each one withered from its bed ;
The stream fell stagnant, and was soon
A bloated marsh, a pest-lagoon ;
The sweet flowers died, the noble trees
Turned black and gaunt anatomies ;
The birds all left the saddened air
To seek some other home as fair ;
The pure white Goddess and her urn
Were covered with the withered fern,—
The red and yellow fans outworn,
And red and yellow leaves forlorn,
Slow drifting round into a heap
Till the fair shapes were buried deep :
The happy Eden rich and fair
Became a savage waste, a lair
Where Silence with broad wings of gloom
Brooded above a nameless tomb. . . .

And thus it was for years and years ;
And only there were bitter tears
Beneath those dark wings shed alway
Instead of the bright fountain's play,
And in the stead of sweet bird-tones
Low unheard solitary moans.

“ Ah, sudden was that ruin sad ;
As sudden, resurrection glad !
Unheralded one quiet night
There came an Angel darkly bright,
An Angel from the Heavenly Throne,
Or else that Goddess carved in stone
Enraptured into life by power
Of her most marvellous beauty's dower :
And from her long robe's sweeping pride
The dead leaves all were scattered wide ;
And from a touch of her soft hand,
Without one gesture of command,
All suddenly was rolled away
A mighty stone, whose broad mass lay
Upon the urn, as on a tomb
There lies a stone to seal its gloom :
And straightway sprang into the night
That joyous Fountain's shaft of light,
Singing its old unwearied tune
Of rapture to the quiet moon,

As strong and swift and pure and high
As ere it ever seemed run dry :
For never since that Long-ago
Had its deep springlets ceased to flow ;
But shut down from the light of day
Their waters sadly oozed away
Through pores of the dim underearth,
Bereft of splendour, speed, and mirth ;
Yet ever ready now as then
To leap into the air again."

"Ah yes," said Jones, "I understand."
Then with his smile of sadness bland,
"*My* fountain never got a chance
To spring into the sunlight's glance,
And wave its mystic silver lance
In time with all the starry dance ;
Yet I believe 'tis ever there
Heart-pulsing in its secret lair,
Until the Goddess some fine day
Shall come and roll the stone away. . . .
Nor have you startled me ; I knew
Quite well it was a Goddess too."

"Because so well you know and speak
Her esoteric Persian-Greek."

"Or shall we say (a truth of wine,
If falsehood in the nectar-shine),

Because a beauty so divine
Has stirred no envy, grudge, or pine
In any girl's or woman's breast,
But only love and joyous zest?—
For if the beauty dazzling thus
Were nubile and not nebulous?"

"This beauty is more real far
Than all the other beauties are ;
And such a beauty's bridal kiss
Transcends all other bridal bliss ;
And such a marriage-love will last
When all the other loves are past.
You know this well, dear friend of mine,
When drinking nectar and not wine."

"I know it,—know it not : we rhyme
The petals of the Flower of Time ;
And rhyming strip them off, perplex
For every leaflet by the next
Is contradicted in its turn ;
And thus we yearning ever yearn,
And ever learning never learn ;
For while we pluck, from hour to hour
New petals spring to clothe the flower,
And till we strip the final one
Can final answer fall to none. . . .

To strip and strip the living bloom,
Nor learn the oracle of Doom
Until the fulgent Flower o' the Day
Is altogether stripped away ;
Then with the dead stem leave the light,
And moulder in eternal night ! ”

“The sad old truth of earthly wine ;
The joyous fable in the shine
Of nectar at the feast divine ! . . .
*Love a near maid, love a far maid,
But let Hebe be your barmaid ;
When she proffers you the cup,
Never fear to drink it up ;
Though you see her crush her wine
From a belladonna vine,
Drink it, pouring on the clods
Prelibation to the gods.*
Reck this rede unto the end :
It is my good night, good friend.”

.

The music 'gan again arise ;
A music of delicious sighs,
A music plaintive with a grief
More exquisite than all relief ;
Music impassioned, but subdued
To a sweet sad dreamy mood. . . .

And now a swift and sudden stream
Of melody breaks through the dream :
The still air trembles, and the whole
Night-darkness fills with life and soul,
And keen stars listen throbbing pale
The drama of the nightingale. . . .
The nightingale is now a thrush. . . .
And now a soaring skylark. . . . Hush !
Never a song in all the world !
But low clouds floating soft and furled,
And rivers winding far away,
And ripples weaving faëry spray,
And mists far-curving swelling round
Dim twilight hills that soon are drowned,
And breezes stirring solemn woods,
And seas embracing solitudes ;
Interminable intervolving,
Weaving webs for redissolving ;
The intertwining, interblending
Of spirals evermore ascending ;
The floating hither, wheeling thither,
Without a whence, without a whither ;
And still we whirl and wheel and float,
But how the dancers are remote !

“Is that the wonderful waltz-tune,
Or is it the full-shining moon ?

**“When six long days of toil are past,
The holy Sabbath comes at last.”**

Oh better than a battle won,
And better than a great deed done,
And better than a martyr's crown,
And better than a king's renown,
And better than a long calm life
With lovely bairns and loving wife,
And better than the sweetest thought
That tearful Memory ever brought
From searching with her rapturous woe
Within the moonlit Long-ago,
And better than the stillest sleep
To him who wakes to moan and weep,
And better than the trance of death
To him who yearning suffereth ;
Better than this, than these, than all
That mortals joys and triumphs call,
Was last night's Meeting, last night's Ball !

The tongue of flame had ceased to play,
The steadfast glow long died away ;
The house was grave-still, and the street
Re-echoed to no wandering feet ;
And still and chill as any stone
* I lay upon the couch alone,
Drest to the white kid-gloves in all
The dress I put on for the Ball :
And there, that glorious flower you see,
She fixed it in my breast for me ;
Could such a flower of flowers have birth
Upon our worn-out frigid earth ?
That golden-hearted amethyst
Her own hand held, her own mouth kissed.

The clocks struck one and two and three,
And each stroke fell as aimed at me ;
For none should muse or read or write
So late into the awful night,
None dare awake the deep affright
That pulseth in the heart of night,
None venture save sleep-shrouded quite
Into the solemn dead of night,
None wander save in dreams of light
Through the vast desert of black night ;

* (It may not be amiss to vouch
The previous note anent this couch.)

And none at three be dressed at all,
 Unless mere night-clothes dress you call
 Or underlinen of a pall ;
 Therefore, my friend, in bidding you
 And all the rest a long adieu,
 For I am weary, Alleleu !—
 Yourself and all I re-advise,
Early to bed and early to rise,
Is the way to be healthy, wealthy, and wise !

EPILOGUE.

(Grossness here indeed is regnant,
 But it is the grossness pregnant ;
 HEINE growled it, ending thus
 His wild *Book of Lazarus* ;
 Modern swansong's final note,
 Hoarse death-rattle in the throat.
 Swan was white or black ?—*Our* candour !
 Black or white no swan's a gander.)

“Glory warms us in the grave !
 Stupid words, that sound so brave !
 Better warmth would give to us
 Molly Seagrim amorous,
 Slobbering kisses lips and tongue,
 And yet reeking from the dung.*

* *Eine Kuh-magd*—Any farm-wench ; but Heine, who knew Fielding, probably had Molly Seagrim in his mind.

Better warmth would likewise dart
Through the cockles of one's heart,
Drinking mulled wine, punch, or grog,
Until helpless as a log,
In the lowest den whose crowd is
Thieves and drabs and ragged rowdies,
Mortgaged to the gallows-rope,
But who meanwhile breathe and hope,
And more enviable far
Than the son of Thetis are.
Yes, Pelides was a judge ;—
Better live the poorest drudge
In the upper world, than loom
On the Stygian shore of gloom
Phantom-Leader, bodiless roamer,
Though besung by mighty Homer.”

WEDDAH AND OM-EL-BONAIN

NOTE.—I found this story, and that of the short piece following, which merit far better English versions than I have been able to accomplish, in the *De l'Amour* of De Stendhal (Henri Beyle), chap. 53, where they are given among "Fragments Extracted and Translated from an Arabic Collection, entitled *The Divan of Love*, compiled by Ebn-Abi-Hadglat." From another of these fragments I quote a few lines by way of introduction: "The Benou-Azra are a tribe famous for love among all the tribes of Arabia. So that the manner in which they love has passed into a proverb, and God has not made any other creatures so tender in loving as are they. Sahid, son of Agba, one day asked an Arab, Of what people art thou? I am of the people who die when they love, answered the Arab. Thou art then of the tribe of Azra? said Sahid. Yes, by the master of the Caaba! replied the Arab. Whence comes it, then, that you thus love? asked Sahid. Our women are beautiful and our young men are chaste, answered the Arab."

On this theme HEINE has a poem of four unrhymed quatrains, *Der Azra*, of which the sense without the melody may be given in English:—

Daily went the wondrous-lovely
Sultan's daughter to and fro there
In the evening by the fountain,
Where the waters white were plashing.

Daily stood the youthful captive
In the evening by the fountain,
Where the waters white were plashing;
Daily grew he pale and paler.

And one evening the princess
Stepped to him with sudden question:
"I would know your name, young captive,
And your country and your kindred."

Then the slave replied: "My name is
Mohammed, I come from Yemen,
And my kindred are the Azra,
They who when they love must perish."

WEDDAH AND OM-EL-BONAIN

PART I.

I.

WEDDAH and Om-el-Bonain, scarcely grown
To boy and girlhood from their swaddling bands,
Were known where'er the Azra tribe was known,
Through Araby and all the neighbouring lands ;
Were chanted in the songs of sweetest tone
Which sprang like fountains 'mid the desert sands :
 They were so beautiful that none who saw
 But felt a rapture trembling into awe.

II.

Once on a dewy eve-tide when the balm
Of herb and flower made all the air rich wine,
And still the sunless shadow of the palm
Sought out the birthplace of the day divine,
These two were playing in the happy calm.
A young chief said : In these be sure a sign
 Great God vouchsafes ; a living talisman
 Of glory and rich weal to bless our clan.

III.

Proud hearts applauded ; but a senior chief
 Said : Perfect beauty is its own sole end ;
 It is ripe flower and fruit, not bud and leaf ;
 The promise and the blessing meet and blend,
 Fulfilled at once : then malice, wrath, and grief,
 Lust of the foe and passion of the friend,
 Assail the marvel ; for all Hell is moved
 Against the work of Allah most approved.

IV.

Thus beauty is that pearl a poor man found ;
 Which could not be surrendered, changed, or sold,
 Which he might never bury in the ground,
 Or hide away within his girdle-fold ;
 But had to wear upon his brow uncrowned,
 A star of storm and terrors ; for, behold,
 The richest kings raged jealous for its light,
 And just men's hearts turned robbers at the sight.

V.

But if the soul be royal as the gem,
 That star of danger may flash victory too,
 The younger urged, and bring the diadem
 To set itself in. And the other : True ;

If all Life's golden apples crown one stem,
 Fate touches none ; but single they are few :
 And whether to defeat or triumph, this
 One star lights war and woe, not peaceful bliss.

VI.

But nothing recked the children in that hour,
 And little recked through fifteen happy years,
 Of any doom in their surpassing dower :
 Rich with the present, free from hopes and fears,
 They dwelt in time as in a heavenly bower :
 Their life was strange to laughter as to tears,
 Serenely glad ; their partings were too brief
 For pain ; and side by side, what thing was grief ?

VII.

Amidst their clan they dwelt in solitude,
 Not haughtily but by instinctive love ;
 As lion mates with lion in the wood,
 And eagle pairs with eagle not with dove ;
 The lowlier creatures finding their own good
 In their own race, nor seeking it above :
 These dreamt as little of divided life
 As that first pair created man and wife.

VIII.

The calm years flowed thus till the youth and maid
 Were almost man and woman, and the spell

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Of passion wrought, and each was self-dismayed ;
The hearts their simple childhood knew so well
Were now such riddles to them, in the shade
And trouble of the mists that seethe and swell
When the large dawn is kindling, which shall
grow
Through crimson fires to steadfast azure glow.

IX.

That year a tribe-feud, which some years had slept
Through faintness, woke up stronger than before ;
And with its stir young hearts on all sides leapt
For battle, swoln with peace and plenteous store ;
Swift couriers to and fro the loud land swept
Weaving thin spites to one vast woof of war :
And Weddah sallied forth elate, ranked man,
A warrior of the warriors of his clan.

X.

Ere long flushed foes turned haggard at his name ;
The beautiful, the terrible : for fire
Burns most intensely in the clearest flame ;
The comeliest steed is ever last to tire
And swiftest footed ; and in war's fierce game
The noblest sword is deadliest in its gyre :
His gentle gravity grew keen and gay
In hottest fight as for a festal day.

XI.

And while he fought far distant with his band,
 Walid the Syrian, Abd-el-Malek's son ;
 Renowned already for a scheme long planned
 With silent patience, and a sharp deed done
 When its ripe fruit leaned ready for his hand,
 And liberal sharing of the fruit well won ;
 Came south to greet the tribe, and knit anew
 Old bonds of friendship and alliance true.

XII.

He had full often from the poets heard
 Of these two children the divinely fair ;
 But was not one to kindle at a word,
 And languish on faint echoes of an air ;
 By what he saw and touched his heart was stirred,
 Nor knew sick longings and the vague despair
 Of those who turn from every nearest boon
 To catch like infants at the reachless moon.

XIII.

But when one sunset flaming crimson-barred
 He saw a damsel like a shape of sleep,
 Who moved as moves in indolence the pard ;
 Above whose veil burned large eyes black and deep,

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The lairs of an intense and slow regard
Which made all splendours of the broad world cheap,
And death and life thin dreams; fate-smitten there
He rested shuddering past the hour of prayer.

XIV.

Be heaven all stars, we feel the one moon's rise :
Who else could move with that imperial grace ?
Who else could bear about those fateful eyes,
Too overwhelming for a mortal face ?
Beyond all heed of questions and surprise
He stood a termless hour in that same place,
Convulsed in silent wrestling with his doom ;
Haggard as one brought living from the tomb.

XV.

And she had shuddered also passing by,
A moment ; for her spirit though intent
Was chilled as conscious of an evil eye ;
But forthwith turned and o'er its one dream bent ;
A woman lilting as she came anigh :
But to destroy on earth was Weddah sent ;
There where he is brave warriors fall before him,
Where he is not pine damsels who adore him.

XVI.

And thus with purpose like a trenchant blade
Forged in that fierce hour's fire, the Syrian chief

Began new life. When next the Council weighed
 The heavy future charged with wrath and grief,
 He spoke his will : I ask to wed the maid,
 The child of Abd-el-Aziz : and, in brief,
 I bring for dowry all our wealth and might,
 Unto our last heart's blood, to fight your fight.

XVII.

All mute with marvelling sat. Her sire then said :
 From infancy unto my brother's son
 She has been held betrothed : our Lord can wed
 Full many a lovelier, many a richer one.
 But quite in vain they reasoned, flattered, pled ;
 This was his proffer, other he had none :
 A boy and girl outweighed the Azra tribe?
 'Twas strange ! His vow was fixed to that sole
 bribe.

XVIII.

And as their couriers came in day by day
 Pregnant with portents of yet blacker ill ;
 And all their urgency broke in fuming spray
 Against the rock of his firm-planted will ;
 The baffled current took a tortuous way,
 And drowned a happy garden green and still,
 O'erwhelming Abd-el-Aziz with that gibe,
 A boy and girl outvalue all our tribe ?

XIX.

He loved his daughter, and he loved yet more
His brother's son ; and now the whole tribe prest
The scale against them : there was raging war,
Too sure of hapless issue in his breast ;
Sea-tossed where rocks on all sides fanged the shore.
She heard him moaning : Would I were at rest,
Ere this should come upon me, in the grave !
Her poor heart bled to hear him weep and rave.

XX.

She flung herself all yearning at his feet ;
The long white malehair dashed her brow with tears ;
But her tears scalded him ; her kisses sweet
Were crueller than iron barbs of spears ;
He had no eyes her tender eyes to meet ;
Her soft caressing words scarce touched his ears
But they were fire and madness in his brain :
Yet while she clasped he mutely clasped again.

XXI.

At length he answered her : A heavy doom
Is laid upon me ; now, when I am old,
And weak, and bending toward the quiet tomb . . .
Can it then be, as we are sometimes told,

That woman, nay, that young girls in their bloom,
 Lovely, beloved, and loving, have been bold
 To give their lives, when blenched the bravest man,
 For safety of their city or their clan?

XXII.

She trembled in cold shadow of a rock
 Leaning to crush her where she knelt fast bound ;
 She grew all ear to catch the coming shock,
 And felt already quakings of the ground ;
 Yet firmly said : Your anguish would not mock
 Your daughter, O my Father : pray expound
 The woeful riddle ; and whate'er my part,
 It is your very blood which feeds this heart.

XXIII.

He told her all : the perils great and near ;
 The might of Walid ; and the friendship long
 Which bound them to his house, and year by year
 With mutual kindnesses had grown more strong
 His offer, his demand, which would not hear
 A word in mitigation right or wrong.
 Her young blood curdled : bring him to our tent,
 That I may plead ; perchance he will relent.

XXIV.

He came ; and found her sitting double-veiled,
 For grief was round her like a funeral stole.

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She pleaded, she o'erwhelmed him, and she failed ;
For still the more her passion moved his soul,
The more he loved her ; when his heart most quailed,
His purpose stretched most eager for the goal :
 I stake myself, house, friends, all, for the tribe
 Which gives me you ; but for no meaner bribe.

XXV.

So her face set into a stony mask,
And heavy silence crushed them for an hour
Ere she could learn the words to say her task :
Let only mutes appeal to Fate's deaf power !
Behold I pledge myself to what you ask,
My sire here sells me for the settled dower :
 The sheikhs can know we are at one ; I pray
 That none else know it ere the wedding-day.

XXVI.

Which shall be when next moon is on the wane
As this to-night : my heart is now the bier
Of that which we have sacrificed and slain ;
My own poor Past, still beautiful and dear,
Cut off from life, wants burial ; and though vain
Is woman's weeping, I must weep I fear
 A little on the well-beloved's tomb
 Ere marriage smiles and blushes can outbloom.

XXVII.

He left them, sire and daughter, to their woe ;
 Himself then sick at heart as they could be :
 But set to work at once, and spurred the slow
 Sad hours till they were fiery-swift as he :
 With messengers on all sides to and fro,
 With ravelled webs of subtle policy,
 He gave the sheikhs good earnest of what aid
 They had so cheaply bought with one fair maid.

XXVIII.

Thus he took Araby's one peerless prize,
 And homeward went ungrudging all the cost ;
 Though she was marble ; with blank arid eyes,
 Weary and hopeless as the waste they crossed
 When neither moon nor star is in the skies,
 And water faileth, and the track is lost.
 He took such statue triumphing for wife,
 Assured his love would kindle it to life.

XXIX.

She had indeed wept, wept and wailed that moon,
 But had not buried yet her shrouded Past ;
 Which ever lay in a most deathlike swoon,
 Pallid and pulseless, motionless and ghast,

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While Fate withheld from it death's perfect boon :
She kept this doleful mystery locked up fast ;
Her form was as its sepulchre of stone,
Her heart its purple couch and hidden throne.

XXX.

She went ; and sweeter voiced than cooing dove
Hassan the bard his farewell ode must render :
We had a Night, the dream of heaven above,
Wherein one moon and countless stars of splendour ;
We had a Moon, the face of perfect love,
Wherein two nights with stars more pure and tender :
Our Night with its one moon we still have here ;
Where is our Moon with its twin nights more dear ?

PART II.

I.

As Weddah and his troop were coming back
From their first foray, which success made brief,
Scouts met him and in sharp haste turned his track
On special mission to a powerful chief,
Who wavered still between the white and black,
And lurked for mere self-profit like a thief.
This errand well fulfilled, at last he came
To flush her tear-pearls with the ruby fame.

II.

Into the camp full joyously he rode,
 Leading his weary escort ; as for him,
 The love and trust that in his bosom glowed
 Had laughed away all weariness of limb.
 The sheikhs, his full report heard, all bestowed
 Well-measured praises, brief and somewhat grim ;
 As veterans scanning the enormous night
 In which this one star shone so bravely bright.

III.

Then Abd-el-Aziz rose and left the tent,
 And he accompanied with eager pace ;
 And marked not how his frank smiles as he went
 Were unreflected in each well-known face ;
 How joyous greetings he on all sides sent
 Brought hollow echoes as from caverned space :
 His heart drank sweet wine 'mid the roses singing,
 And thought the whole world with like revels
 ringing.

IV.

He entered with his uncle, and his glance
 Sank disappointed. But the old man wept
 With passion o'er him, eyeing him askance ;
 And made him eat and drink ; and ever kept

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Questioning, questioning, as to every chance
Throughout his absence ; keen to intercept
The fatal, But my cousin ? ready strung
Upon the tense lips by the eager tongue.

v.

At length it flew, the lover's wingèd dart ;
He sped it wreathed with flowers of hope and
joy,
It pierced with iron point the old man's heart,
Who quivering cried : You are, then, still a boy !
Love, love, the sweet to meet, the smart to part,
Make all your world of pleasure and annoy !
Is this a time for dalliance in rose bowers ?
The vultures gather ; do they scent sweet flowers ?

vi.

It is a time of woe and shame, of strife
Whose victory must be dolorous as defeat :
The sons of Ishmael clutch the stranger's knife
To stab each other ; every corpse you meet
Has held a Moslem soul, an Arab life :
The town-serfs prisoned in stark fort and street
Exult while countless tents that freely roam
Perish like proud ships clashing in the foam.

VII.

We might learn wisdom from our foes and thralls !
 The mongrels of a hundred barbarous races,
 Who know not their own sires, appease their brawls,
 Leave night and sunward set their impure faces,
 To bay in concert round old Syrian walls,
 And thrust their three gods on our holy places :
 We have one Sire, one Prophet, and one Lord,
 And yet against each other turn the sword.

VIII.

Thus long he groaned with fevered bitterness,
 Till, Say at least, my Father, she is well !
 Stung prudence out of patience : Surely yes !
 The children of the faith whom Azrael
 Hath gathered, do they suffer our distress ?—
 But smitten by that word the lover fell,
 As if at such rash mention of his name
 That bird of God with wings of midnight came.

IX.

Deep in the shadow of those awful plumes
 A night and day and night he senseless lay ;
 And Abd-el-Aziz cowered 'mid deeper glooms,
 Silent in vast despair, both night and day :

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It seemed two forms belonging to the tombs
Had been abandoned in that tent ; for they
 Were stark and still and mute alike, although
 The one was conscious of their double woe.

X.

At last death left the balance, and the scale
Of wretched life jarred earth : and in the morn
The lover woke, confused as if a veil
Of heavy dreams involved him ; weak and worn
And cold at heart, and wondering what bale
Had wounded him and left him thus forlorn :
 So still half-stunned with anguish he lay long,
 Fretful to rend the shroud that wrapt his wrong.

XI.

He turned ; and on the pillow, near his head,
He saw a toy, a trifle, that gave tongue
To mute disaster : forthwith on his bed
The coiled-snake Memory hissed and sprang and
 stung :
Then all the fury of the storm was shed
From the black swollen clouds that overhung ;
 The hot rain poured, the fierce gusts shook his
 soul,
 Wild flashes lit waste gloom from pole to pole.

XII.

He hardly dared to touch the petty thing,
The talisman of this tremendous spell :
A purse of dark blue silk ; a golden ring,
A letter in the hand he knew so well.
Still as he sought to read new gusts would fling
Wet blindness in his vision, and a knell
Of rushing thunder trample through his brain
And tread him down into the swoon again.

XIII.

He read : Farewell ! In one sad word I weave
More thoughts than pen could write or tongue
declare.
No other word can Om-el-Bonain leave
To Weddah, save her blessing ; and her prayer.
That he will quail not, though his heart must grieve,
That all his strength and valour, skill and care,
Shall be devoted loyally to serve
The sacred Tribe, and never self-ward swerve.

XIV.

For verily the Tribe is all, and we
Are nothing singly save as parts of it :
The one great Nile flows ever to the sea,
The waterdrops for ever change and flit ;

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And some the first ooze snares, and some may be
The King's sweet draught, proud Cairo's mirror ; fit
For all each service of the stream whose fame
They share, by which alone they have a name.

XV.

And since I know that you cannot forget,
And am too sure your love will never change,
I leave my image to your soul : but yet
Keep it as shrined and shrouded till the strange
Sad dream of life, illusion and regret,
Is ended ; short must be its longest range.
Farewell ! Hope gleams the wan lamp in a tomb
Above a corpse that waits the final doom.

XVI.

This writing was a dear but cruel friend
That dragged him from the deep, and held him
fast
Upon life's shore, who would have found an end,
Peace and oblivion. Turn from such a past
To such a future, and unquailing wend
Its infinite hopeless hours ! he shrank aghast :
Yet in this utmost weakness swore to make
The dreadful sacrifice for her dear sake.

XVII.

But when he stood as one about to fall,
 And would go weep upon her tomb alone,
 And Abd-el-Aziz had to tell him all,
 The cry of anguish took a harsher tone :
 Rich harem coverlets for funeral pall,
 For grave a Syrian marriage couch and throne !
 A human rival, breathing mortal breath,
 And not the star-cold sanctity of Death !

XVIII.

This truth was as a potent poison-draught,
 Fire in the entrails, wild fire in the brain,
 Which kindled savage strength in him who quaffed
 And did not die of its first maddening pain.
 It struck him like the mere malignant shaft
 Which stings a warrior into sense again,
 Who lay benumbed with wounds, and would
 have died
 Unroused : the fresh wound makes him crawl
 and hide.

XIX.

A month he wandered in wild solitude ;
 And in that month grew old, and yet grew stron :

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Now lying prone and still as death would brood
The whole long day through and the whole night
long ;

Now demon-driven day and night pursued
Stark weariness amidst the clamorous throng
Of thoughts that raged with memory and desire,
And parched, his bruised feet burning, could not
tire.

XX.

When he came back, o'ermastered by his vow
To serve the Tribe through which he was unblest,
None gazed without remorse upon his brow,
None felt his glance without an aching breast :
Magnificent in beauty even now,
Ravaged by grief and fury and unrest,
He moved among them swift and stern of deed,
And always silent save in action's need.

XXI.

And thus went forth, and unrejoicingly
Drank deep of war's hot wine : as one who drinks
And only grows more sullen, while yet he
Never the challenge of the full cup shrinks ;
And rises pale with horror when the glee
Of careless revellers into slumber sinks,
Because the feast which could not give him joy
At least kept phantoms from their worst annoy.

XXII.

The lion of the Azra is come back
 A meagre wolf! foes mocked, who mocked no more
 When midnight scared them with his fresh attack
 After the long day's fighting, and the war
 Found him for ever wolf-like on their track,
 As if consumed with slakeless thirst of gore :
 Since he was cursed from slumber and repose,
 He wreaked his restlessness on friends and foes.

XXIII.

The lightnings of his keen sword ever flashed
 Without a ray of lightning in his glance ;
 His blade where blades were thickest clove or
 clashed
 Without a war-cry : ever in advance
 He sought out death ; but death as if abashed
 Adopted for its own his sword and lance,
 And rode his steed, and swayed aside or blunted
 The eager hostile weapons he affronted.

XXIV.

Once in the thick of battle as he raged
 Thus cold and dumb amidst the furious cries,
 Hassan the bard was near to him engaged,
 And read a weird in those forlorn fixed eyes ;

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And singing of that combat they had waged
Gave voice to what surpassed his own surmise :

*For our young Lion of the mateless doom
Shall never go a cold corpse to the tomb !*

XXV.

Awe silenced him who sang, and deep awe fell
On those who heard it, round the campfire's
blaze :

But when they questioned he had nought to tell ;
The vision had departed from his gaze.

The verse took wing and was a mighty spell ;
Upon the foe new terror and amaze,

To friends redoubled force ; to one alone,
The hero's self, it long remained unknown.

XXVI.

While Weddah in the South with fiery will
Bore conquest wheresoe'er his banner flew,
Walid with royal heart and patient skill
Upon the Syrian confines triumphed too.
They never met : each felt a savage thrill
Which jarred his inmost being through and through
As still fresh fame the other's fame enlarged :
Each wished his rival in the ranks he charged.

XXVII.

And when the foemen sued at length for peace
 To victors surfeited with war's alarms,
 Save him who knew all rest in rest must cease,
 They said : O warriors, not by your own arms,
 Though they are mighty! may their might increase!
 But more by Om-el-Bonain's fatal charms,
 Possessing both who lost her and who won,
 Have we been baffled, vanquished, and undone.

XXVIII.

Whence Hassan sang his sudden daring ode
 Of Beauty revelling in the storm of fight:
 For if the warriors into battle rode,
 Their hearts were kindled by her living light;
 Either as sun that in pure azure glowed,
 Or baleful star in deep despair's black night:
 And whether by despair or joy she lit
 Intenser fires perplexed the poet's wit.

XXIX.

And would you know why empires break asunder,
 Why peoples perish and proud cities fall;
 Seek not the captains where the steedcloudsthunder,
 Seek not the elders in the council hall;

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But seek the chamber where some shining wonder
Of delicate beauty nestles, far from all

The turmoil, toying with adornments queenly,
And murmuring songs of tender love serenely.

XXX.

The clashing cymbals and the trumpet's clangour
Are peacefuller than her soft trembling lute ;
The armies raging with hot fire of anger
Are gentler than her gentle glances mute ;
The restless rushings of her dainty languor
Outveer the wind, outspeed the barb's pursuit :

Well Hassan knows ; who sings high laud and
blessing

To this dear fatal riddle past all guessing.

PART III.

I.

The war was over for the time ; and men
Returned to heal its wounds, repair its waste,
And thus grow strong and rich to fight again.
And Weddah, cold in victory's sun, embraced
The uncle whom his glory warmed ; and then,
Gathering his spoil of gems and gold in haste,

Rode forth: the clansmen wondered much to find
His famous favourite steed was left behind.

II.

He set out in the night : none knew his goal,
 Though some might fix it in their secret thought.
 He could no longer stifle or control,
 In calm by battle's fever undistraught,
 The piteous yearning of his famished soul
 Which unappeasably its food besought ;
 Fretting his life out like an infant's cry,
 Let us but see her once before we die !

III.

When he returned not, soon the rumour spread,
 That he had vanished now his work was done ;
 The prophecy had been fulfilled ; not dead,
 But in the body borne beyond the sun,
 He lived eternal life. He heard this said
 Himself in Walid's city, where as one
 Who sojourns but for traffic's sake he dwelt ;
 And hearing it, more surely shrouded felt.

IV.

Courteous and humble as beseemeth trade,
 While ever on the watch, some gems he sold :
 Men said, this young man is discreet and staid,
 Yet fair in dealing, nor too fond of gold.

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He smiled to hear his virtues thus arrayed,
A smile that gloomed to frowning ; but controlled
The haughty spirit surging in his breast ;
The end in view, what mattered all the rest ?

V.

The end in reach : for now the favourite slave
Of Om-el-Bonain, as he knew full well ;
A frank-eyed girl, whose bosom was a wave
Whereon love's lotus lightly rose and fell ;
Drew near to him, attracted by his grave
Unseptr'd majesty, and by the spell
Of his intense and fathomless regard,
Splendid in gloom as midnight myriad-starred.

VI.

She haggled for a trinket with her tongue
To veil the eager commerce of her eyes ;
Those daring smugglers when the heart is young,
For contraband of passion. His disguise
In talk with her but loosely round him hung ;
She glimpsed a secret and an enterprise ;
Love's flower, unsunned by hope, soon fades ;
she grieves,
Yet still returns to scent the rich dead leaves.

VII.

Till sick at heart and desperate with delay
 He ventured all, abruptly flinging down
 The weary mask : if death must end the play,
 Better at once : I learn that in your town
 Dwells Om-el-Bonain, whom you know men say,
 Upon her eye-flash dropped a decent frown :
 She is my mistress, and great Walid's wife—
 The word his heart sought, stabbed in with a knife.

VIII.

Your mistress is my cousin ; and will be
 The friend of who shall tell her I am here.
 But if I may not trust your secrecy,
 Tell Walid, tell not her : and have no fear
 That I will harm you for harm done to me,
 Unaimed at her. The life I hold not dear
 Might dower you well. But with a passionate oath
 The eager girl swore loyalty to both.

IX.

Then hurried from him to her lady sweet,
 And thrilled her frozen heart with burning pang :
 For life resigned and torpid in defeat
 To new contention with its fate upsprang,

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This sword of hope found lying at her feet
While love's impetuous clarion summons rang :
 Weddah alive : alive and here ! Beware !
 If you now mock, Hell mock your dying prayer !

X.

I saw a merchant : never chief or king
Of form so noble visited our land ;
He wore a little ring, a lady's ring,
On the last finger of a feared right hand ;
Some woe enormous overshadowing
Made beauty terrible that had been bland ;
 He was convulsed when he would speak your
 name,
 From such abysses of his heart it came.

XI.

Now whether this be Weddah's self or not,
My Lady in her wisdom must decide.
The lady's questions ploughed the self-same spot
Over and over lest some grains should hide
Of this vast treasure fallen to her lot :
Swear by the Prophet's tomb I may confide
 In you as in myself until the end ;
 And Om-el-Bonain lives and dies your friend.

XII.

Brave Amine swore, and bravely held the vow.
 Her mistress kept her babbling all that eve,
 A pleasant rill. And on the morrow : Now
 Go bid him tell all friends that he must leave
 In seven days ; so much we must allow,
 So many starving hours of bliss bereave !
 His travels urge him in his own despite ;
 He gives a farewell feast on such a night :

XIII.

And in the meanwhile he shall fully learn
 What is to follow. When this message came,
 The thick dark in him 'gan to seethe and burn
 Till soul and body fused in one clear flame.
 His guests all blinked with wonder to discern
 This glowing heart of joy ; and flushed with shame
 Unmerited for having thought him cold,
 Who made their old feel young, their young
 feel old.

XIV.

The long week passed ; the morning came to crown
 Or kill the lovers' hope. It was a day
 Well chosen, for some guests of high renown
 Left Walid, who would speed them on their way ;

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And festal tumult filled the sunny town.
The merchant in departure strolled astray
 Amongst the groups about the palace heaving
 To glimpse the rich procession form for leaving.

XV.

And when it left, absorbing every eye ;
A stream of splendours rolling with the din
Of horn and tabor under that blue sky ;
Came Amine carelessly and led him in,
With chat of certain anklets she would buy ;
And led him lounging onwards till they win
 A storeroom where her mistress daily spent
 Some matin hours on household cares intent.

XVI.

Large chests were ranged around it, one of which
They had made ready with most loving care ;
Lurked apertures among the carvings rich,
Above its deep soft couch, for light and air :
Behold your prison cell, your palace niche,
The jewel casket of my Lady fair !
 I lock you in ; from her must come your key :
 Love's captives pay sweet ransom to get free !

XVII.

She found her mistress fever-flushed, and told
 Their full success : Our prisoner is secure ;
 A lion meek as lambkin of the fold,
 Prepared your harshest torments to endure !
 But, dearest Lady, as you have been bold,
 Be prudent, prudent, prudent, and assure
 Long life to bliss. Now with your leave I go
 To be well seen of all the house below.

XVIII.

She took another stairway for descent,
 And sauntered round to the front courtyard gate,
 Chatting and laughing lightly as she went
 With various groups, all busy in debate
 On those departed guests : and some were shent
 For meanness maugre retinue and state,
 And some extolled for bounteous disposition,
 And all summed up with judgment-day precision.

XIX.

Of all her fellow-slaves it seemed but one,
 Whose breast was tinder for love's flame would she
 Vouchsafe a spark, had spied the venture run :
 Soho, my flirting madam, where is he

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You brought in here an hour since with your fun ?
A happy rogue, whoever he may be !
Have you already tired of this new dandy,
Or hid him somewhere to be always handy ?

XX.

The stupid jealous creature that you are !
Where were your eyes, then, not to know his face ?
For weeks back he has dealt in our bazaar,
And now is on the road to some new place.
He had an emerald and diamond star
I thought might win my poor dear Lady's grace ;
She would not even look at it, alack !
I packed him off for ever with his pack.

XXI.

Thus these long-hapless lovers for awhile,
Enringed with dreadful fire, safe ambush found,
Screened by its very glare ; a magic isle
By roaring billows guarded well till drowned ;
A refuge spot of green and liquid smile
Whose rampart was the simoom gathering round :
If darkness hid them, it was thunder gloom
Whose light must come in lightnings to consume.

XXII.

And even as Iskander's self, for whom
 The whole broad earth sufficed not, found at last
 Full scope vouchsafed him in the narrow tomb ;
 So he long pining in the desert vast
 As in a dungeon, found now ample room,
 Found perfect freedom and content, shut fast
 Alive within that coffer-coffin lonely,
 Which gave him issue to that chamber only.

XXIII.

They knew what peril compassed them about,
 But could not feel the dread it would inspire ;
 Imperious love shut other passions out,
 Or made them fuel for his altar fire.
 At first one sole thought harassed them with doubt ;
 To kill her lord and flee ? Then tribe and sire
 Would justly curse them ; for in every act
 He had been loyal to the evil pact.

XXIV.

He had indeed wronged them ; for well he knew
 Their love from infancy, their plighted troth,
 When merciless in mastery he drew
 From her repugnant lips the fatal oath :

That love avenged the wrong of love was due ;
 But still his blood was sacred to them both ;
 The tender husband and the proved ally
 They dare not harm ; must death come, they
 could die.

xxv.

Die ! Often he would dream for hours supine
 Upon his lidded couch, Life's dream is over ;
 I wait the resurrection in this shrine :
 Anon an angel cometh to uncover
 The inmost glories of the realm divine,
 Because though dead I still am faithful lover ;
 My spirit drinks its fill of bliss, and then
 Sinks back into this twilight trance again.

xxvi.

Like bird above its young one in the nest
 Which cannot fly, he often heard her singing ;
 The thrill and swell of rapture from her breast
 In fountains of delightful music springing :
 It seemed he had been borne among the blest,
 Whose quires around his darksome couch were
 ringing ;
 Long after that celestial voice sank mute
 His heartstrings kept sweet tremble like a lute.

XXVII.

She heard his breathing like a muffled chime,
She heard his tranquil heart-beats through the flow
Of busy menials in the morning time ;
Far-couched at night she felt a sudden glow,
And straight her breathing answered rhyme for
rhyme

His softest furtive footsteps to and fro :
And none else heard ? She marvelled how the
sense
Of living souls could be so dull and dense.

XXVIII.

Once early, early, ere the dawn grew loud,
She stole to watch his slumber by its gleam ;
And blushing with a soft laugh-gurgle bowed
And sank as in the bosom of a stream,
An ardent angel in a rosy cloud
Resolving the enchantment of his dream :
Where there is room for thee, is room for us ;
So may I share thy death-sarcophagus !

XXIX.

She grew so lovely, ravishing, and sweet,
Her brow so radiant and her lips so warm ;

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Such rich heart-music stirred her buoyant feet,
And swayed the gestures of her lithe young form,
And revelled in her voice to bliss complete ;
That Walid whirled with his great passion's storm,
 Befooled with joy, went doting down his hell :
 Oh, tame and meek, my skittish wild gazelle !

XXX.

Thus these, sings Hassan, of their love's full
 measure
Drank swiftly in that circle of swift fire ;
A veil of light and ardour to their pleasure
Till it revealed their ashes on one pyre :
Some never win, some spend in youth this treasure,
And crawl down sad age starvelings of desire :
 These lavished royal wealth in one brief season,
 But Death found both so rich he gave them
 reason.

PART IV.

I.

The tender almond-blossom flushed and white
Sank floating in warm flakes through lucid air ;
The rose flung forth into the sea of light
Her heart of fire and incense burning bare ;

The nightingale thrilled all the breathless night
 With passion so intense it seemed despair :
 And still these lovers drank love's perfect wine
 From that gold urn of secrecy divine.

II.

Then Fate prepared the end. A grey old man,
 Bowed down with grief who had not bent with time,
 Made way to Walid in the full divan :
 His son, great-hearted and in youth's hot prime,
 Was now a fugitive and under ban
 For an indignant deed of sinless crime ;
 A noble heirloom pearl the suppliant brought
 To clear the clouded face ere he besought.

III.

This pearl in Walid's mood of golden joy
 Shone fair as morning star in rosy dawn ;
 He called his minion, Motar : Take this toy
 Unto your Lady where she sits withdrawn,
 With my love-greeting, and this message, boy :
 Were this a string of such, a monarch's pawn,
 A pearl for every note, it would not pay
 That song I heard you singing yesterday.

IV.

They had been leaning for an hour perchance,
 Motionless, gazing in each other's eyes ;
 Floating in deep pure joy, whose still expanse
 Rippled but rarely with long satiate sighs ;
 Their souls so intermingled in the trance,
 So far away dissolved through fervent skies,
 That it was marvel how each fair mute form
 Without its pulse and breath remained life-warm.

V.

When rapid footsteps almost at the door
 Stung her to vigilance, and her fierce start
 Shook Weddah, and that lion of proud war
 Must flee to covert like a timid hart :
 But drunken with the message he now bore
 The saucy youth flew in, Fate's servile dart,
 Without announcement ; and espied, what he,
 Still subtle though amazed, feigned not to see.

VI.

The message with the goodly pearl he gave :
 She could for wrath have ground it into dust
 Between her richer teeth, and stabbed the slave
 Who brought it ; but most bitterly she must

Put on sweet smiles of pleasure, and the knave
With tender answer full of thanks entrust.

He lingered : Our kind lady will bestow
Some little mark of bounty ere I go ?

VII.

Her anger cried : Only the message dear
Has saved the messenger from punishment ;
If evermore as now you enter here
You shall be scourged and starved and prison-pent.
He cowered away from her in sullen fear,
And darted from the room ; and as he went
The sting of her rebuke was curdling all
His blood of vanity to poison gall.

VIII.

He hissed in Walid's ear the seething spite :
My Lord's pearl by my Lady's was surpassed ;
In that rich cedar coffer to the right
I saw the treasure being hidden fast ;
A gallant, young and beautiful and bright.
Unmothered slave, be that foul lie your last !
And clove the scandal with his instant sword
Strong Walid : Motar had his full reward.

IX.

When Weddah, plunged from glory into gloom,
 Heard that last speech of Om-el-Bonain there,
 A sudden ominous sense of icy doom
 Assailed his glowing heart with bleak despair.
 The moment that false slave had left the room
 She sprang to seize her lover in his lair :
 She bowed all quivering like a storm-swept palm ;
 He rose to meet her solemn, pale and calm.

X.

He clasped her with strong passion to his breast,
 He kissed her with a very tender kiss :
 Soul of my soul ! what lives men call most blest
 Can be compared to our brief lives in bliss ?
 But one wild year of anguish and unrest ;
 Three moons of perfect secret love ! Were this
 My dying hour, I thankfully attest
 Of all earth's dooms I have enjoyed the best.

XI.

What, weeping, thou, such kiss-unworthy tears !
 The glory of the Azra must not weep,
 Whom mighty Weddah worships, for cold fears ;
 But only for strong love, in stillness deep,

Secluded from all alien eyes and ears.
 And now to vigil, and perchance to sleep,
 Enshrined once more : be proud and calm and
 strong ;
 Your second visitor will come ere long.

XII.

And scarcely was all said when Walid came,
 Full gently stealing for a tiger-spring ;
 His love and fury, hope and fear and shame,
 All mad with venom from that serpent's sting,
 Like wild beasts huddled in a den of flame
 Within the cool white palace of a king :
 She rose to greet ; he deigned no glance of quest,
 But went and lolled upon that cedar chest.

XIII.

I come like any haggler of the mart,
 Who having sent a bauble seeks its price :
 Will you forgive the meanness of my part,
 And one of these fair coffers sacrifice ?
 A clutch of iron fingers gript her heart
 Till it seemed bursting in the cruel vice :
 And yet she quivered not, nor breathed a moan :
 Are not myself and all things here your own ?

XIV.

I thank you for the bountiful award ;
 And choose, say this whereon I now sit here ?
 Take any, take them all ; but that, my Lord,
 Is full of household stuff and woman's gear.
 I want the coffer, not what it may hoard,
 However rich and beautiful and dear.
 And it is thine, she said ; and this the key :
 Her royal hand outheld it steadfastly.

XV.

Swift as a double flash from thunder-skies
 The angel and the devil of his doubt
 Flamed from the sombre windows of his eyes :
 He went and took the key she thus held out,
 And turned as if he would unlock his prize.
 She breathed not ; all the air ran blood about
 A swirl of terrors and wild hopes of guilt ;
 Calm Weddah seized, then loosed, his dagger-hilt.

XVI.

But Walid had restrained himself, and thought :
 Shall I unlock the secret of my soul,
 The mystery of my Fate, that has been brought
 So perfectly within my own control ?

That were indeed a work by folly wrought :
 For Time, in this my vassal, must unroll
 To me, and none but me, what I would learn ;
 I hold the vantage, undiscerned discern.

XVII.

He summoned certain slaves, and bade them bear
 The coffer he had sealed with his own seal
 Into a room below with strictest care ;
 And followed thoughtful at the last one's heel.
 At noontide Amine found her mistress there,
 Benumbed with horror, deaf to her appeal ;
 The sightless eyes fixed glaring on that door
 By which her soul had vanished evermore.

XVIII.

Beneath the cedar whose noonshadow large,
 Level from massive trunk, outspread halfway
 Adown a swardslope to the river marge,
 Where rosebowers shone between the willows grey,
 The wondering bearers bore their heavy charge ;
 And where the central shadow thickest lay
 He bade them delve a pit, and delve it deep
 Till watersprings against their strokes should leap.

XIX.

Then waved them to a distance, while he bowed
 Upon the coffer, hearkening for a space :
 If truth bought that poor wretch his bloody shroud,
 I bury thus her guilt and my disgrace ;
 And you, as by the whole earth disavowed,
 Sink into nothingness and leave no trace :
 If not, it is a harmless whim enough
 To sepulchre a chest of household stuff.

XX.

With face encircled by his hands, which leaned
 Upon the wood, he challenged clear and slow :
 The hollow sound, his full hot breath thus screened
 Suffused his visage with a tingling glow ;
 His pulse, his vesture's rustling intervened
 And marred the silence : he drew back, and so
 Knelt listening yet awhile with bated breath :
 The secret lay as mute and still as death.

XXI.

Above there in her chamber Weddah might
 Have leapt forth suddenly their foe to kill.
 Ev'n here with hazard of swift fight and flight
 Escaped or perished as a warrior still ;

But thus through him her name had suffered blight:
He locked his breath and nerves with rigid will.
So Walid first let sink his key unused,
Then signed the slaves back : they wrought on,
he mused

XXII.

Against the dark bulk swelled the waters thin ;
The stones and earth were trampled to a mound.
He then broke silence, stern and sad : Within
That coffer ye have buried, sealed and bound,
Lies one of the most potent evil djinn,
Whose hate on me and mine hath darkly frowned ;
He sought to kill your mistress : Hell and Doom
And Allah's curse all guard this dungeon-tomb !

XXIII.

And Walid never spoke of this again,
And none dared ask him ; for his brow grew black
His eye flamed evil and appalling when
Some careless word but strayed upon a track
That might from far lead to it : therefore men
Spoke only of the thing behind his back.
The cedar shadow centred by that mound
Was sacredly eschewed as haunted ground.

XXIV.

But one pale phantom, noon and night and morn,
 Was ever seen there ; quiet as a stone,
 Huddled and shapeless, weeping tears forlorn
 As silent as the dews ; her heart alone
 And not her lips, whose seal was never torn,
 Upbraiding sluggish death with constant moan.
 Hushed whispers circled, piteous eyes were wet ;
 The captive djinnee holds her captive yet.

XXV.

Thus Walid learned too well the bitter truth,
 His home dissolved, its marvellous joy a cheat ;
 Yet gave no sign to her : for there was ruth
 Of memories gall itself left subtly sweet ;
 And consciousness of wrong against her youth,
 And surfeit of a vengeance so complete :
 He could not stab her bleeding heart ; her name
 With his own honour he kept pure from shame.

XXVI.

She thought Death dead, or prisoned in deep Hell
 As sole assuager of the human lot :
 But when the evening of the seventh day fell
 Walid alone dared tread the fatal spot :

WEDDAH AND OM-EL-BONAIN 101

She crouched as who would plunge into a well,
Livid and writhed into a desperate knot ;
Her fingers clutched like talons in the mould :
Thus the last time his arms about her fold.

XXVII.

As if to glut the demon with her doom,
And break the spell, there where her corse was
found
He had it buried ; and a simple tomb
Of black-domed marble sealed the dolorous mound ;
And there was set to guard the cedar gloom
A triple cirque of cypress-trees around :
Thus Love wrought Destiny to join his slaves
Weddah and Om-el-Bonain in their graves.

XXVIII.

True Amine, freed and richly dowered, no less
Had served until the end her lady dear ;
And shrouded for the grave that loveliness
Whose noon-eclipse left life without its peer :
Then sought the Azra in her lone distress,
And tended Abd-el-Aziz through the sere
Forlorn last days ; and married in the clan,
And bore brave children to a valiant man.

XXIX.

Great Walid lived long years beyond this woe,
 And still increased in wealth and power and glory ;
 A loyal friend, a formidable foe ;
 Each Azra was his mother's child saith story ;
 And he saw goodly children round him grow
 To keep his name green when Death took him hoary :
 So prosperous, was he happy too ? the sage
 Cites this one counsel of his reverend age :

XXX.

Have brood-mares in your stables, my young friend,
 And women in your harem, but no wife :
 A common daggerblade may pierce or rend,
 A month bring healing ; this, the choicest knife
 In Fate's whole armoury, wounds beyond amend,
 And with a scratch can poison all your life ;
 And it lies naked in your naked breast
 When you are drunk with joy and sleep's rich rest.

XXXI.

As surely as a very precious stone
 Finds out that jeweller who doth excel,
 So surely to the bard becometh known
 The tale which only he can fitly tell :

A few years thence, and Walid's heart alone
Had thrilled not to a talisman's great spell,
His deathstone set in Hassan's golden verse ;
Here poorly copied in cheap bronze or worse.

XXXII.

He ends : We know not which to most admire ;
The lover who went silent to his doom ;
The spouse obedient to her lord's just ire,
The mistress faithful to her lover's tomb ;
The husband calm in jealousy's fierce fire,
Who strode unswerving through the doubtful gloom
To vengeance instant, secret and complete,
And did not strike one blow more than was meet.

XXXIII.

With stringent cords of circumstance dark Fate
Doth certain lives here so entoil and mesh
That some or all must strangle if they wait,
And knife to cut the knots must cut quick flesh :
The first strong arm free severs ere too late ;
Fresh writhings would but tangle it afresh :
To die with valiant fortitude, to kill
As priest not butcher ; so much scope has will.

XXXIV.

These perished, and he slew them, in such wise
 That all may meet as friends and free from shame,
 Whether they meet in Hell or Paradise.
 If he has won long life and power and fame,
 Our darlings too have won their own set prize,
 Conjoined for evermore in true love's name :
 The Azra die when they do love, of old
 Was graven with the iron pen, on gold.

XXXV.

May Allah grant eternal joy and youth
 In fateless Heaven to one and all of these.
 And for himself a little grain of ruth
 The bard will beg, this once, while on his knees ;
 Who cannot always see the very truth,
 And does not always sing the truth he sees,
 But something pleasanter to foolish ears
 That should be tickled not with straws but
 spears.

TWO LOVERS

THEIR eyes met; flashed an instant like swift swords
That leapt unparrying to each other's heart,
Jarring convulsion through the inmost chords;
Then fell, for they had fully done their part.

She, in the manner of her folk unveiled,
Might have been veiled for all he saw of her;
Those sudden eyes, from which he reeled and
 quailed;
The old life dead, no new life yet astir.

His good steed bore him onward slow and proud:
And through the open lattice still she leant;
Pale, still, though whirled in a black rushing cloud,
As if on her fair flowers and dreams intent.

Days passed, and he passed timid, furtive, slow:
Nights came, and he came motionless and mute;
A steadfast sentinel till morning-glow,
Though blank her window, dumb her voice and
 lute.

She loved : the Cross stretched rigid arms to scare
Her soul from the perdition of that love ;
She saw Christ's wounds bleed when she knelt in
prayer,
And frown abhorrent all the saints above.

He loved : the Crescent hung with sharp cold
gleam,
A scimitar to cleave such love in twain ;
The Prophet menaced in his waking dream,
Livid and swoln with wrath that great brow-vein.

Each sternly true to the immortal soul,
Crushed down the passion of the mortal heart ;
Which bled away beneath the iron control,
But inwardly : they die ; none sees the smart.

Thus long months went, until his time came round
To leave that city terrible and dear ;
To go afar on soulless business bound,
Perchance for absence of a whole dead year.

No word : but as she knelt to pray one night,
What was that silk thing pendant from the Cross?
Half of a talisman of chrysolite :
Farewell! Full triumph stunned like fatal loss.

A sacred jewel-charm of sovereign power
 'Gainst demons haunting soul and sense and
 brain,
'Gainst madness : had it not until that hour
 Despite love's impious frenzy kept him sane ?

Now let her look forth boldly day by day ;
 He will not come to wound her with his eyes ;
Now at the open lattice darkling stay,
 Only the stars are watching from the skies ;

Now with clear spirit let her sing and pray ;
 No human presence clouds her Lord's full light:
Now let her weep and moan and waste away,
 With broken heart a-bleeding day and night.

Thin as a spectre, haggard, taciturn,
 He reached his native city ; there did all
He had to do : indifferent yet stern,
 As one whose task must end ere evening-fall.

Then sank, and knew that Azrael was near :
 The hard dull rage of impotent remorse
Burned into passion that consumed old fear :
 He loathed his unlived life, his unspent force.

“Must we be sundered, then, beyond the grave,
By that which here has sundered us? Not so!
I can be lost with her I cannot save,
And with these Christian dogs to deep Hell go.”

A priest baptized the sinking renegade,
A priest assured him of the Heaven he spurned;
His wealth for many a mass thereafter paid;
And many a Moslem his example turned.

A friend had sworn to do his last behest;
To be his swift and faithful messenger:
His own half talisman from his true breast
Would seal the truth of all things told to her.

The funeral over, while the stars yet shone
Though pale in the new dawn, this friend forth-
spurred;
Brief rests, long stages, hurried fiercely on;
Hating the errand, loyal to his word.

Twenty days' travel done in thrice three days,
He reached her city, found her mansion there;
A crowd before it busy with amaze,
Cries from within it wounding the sweet air.

She was no more since that day's sun had set ;
But wonder outran grief ; for ere she died
Infinite yearning, fathomless regret,
Flooded her soul and drowned its faith and pride.

"Shall I be happy with the saints above,
While he is burning in the paynim Hell ?
Here I have cheated him of all my love,
But there with him I can for ever dwell."

So she renounced the Cross and threefold God,
And died in Islam ; whence the bruit was great.
Silent the friend his backward journey trod,
Silent, and shrouded with the sense of Fate.

Thus in the very hour supreme of death
These two great hearts first dared live perfect life ;
Drew inspiration with their failing breath,
Snatched victory as they sank down slain in strife.

And thus Fate mocked them, who when life was
sweet
Had kept apart, both famished to the core ;
Let them draw near and in the death-point meet,
But to diverge for ever, evermore.

Yet both died happy in self-sacrifice ;
A dolorous happiness, yet true and deep :
And Gods and Fate and Hell and Paradise
Perchance are one to their eternal sleep.

Poor human hearts, that yearn beyond the tomb,
Wherein you all must moulder into dust !
What has the blank immitigable gloom
Of light or fervour to reward your trust ?

Live out your whole free life while yet on earth ;
Seize the quick Present, prize your one sure boon ;
Though brief, each day a golden sun has birth ;
Though dim, the night is gemmed with stars
and moon.

Love out your cordial love, hate out your hate ;
Be strong to grasp a foe, to clasp a friend :
Your wants true laws are ; thirst and hunger sate :
Feel you have been yourselves when comes
the end.

Let the great gods, if they indeed exist,
Fight out their fight themselves ; for they are
strong :
How can we puny mortals e'er assist ?
How judge the supra-mortal right and wrong ?

But if we made these gods, with all their strife,
And not they us : what frenzy equals this ;
To starve, maim, poison, strangle our poor life,
For empty shadows of death's dark abyss ?

This man and maiden claim a brother's tear,
Martyrs of sweet love, killed by bitter faith ;
Defrauded by the Gods of glad life here,
And mocked by Doom in their heroic death.

1867,

TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH *

"Tired with all these, for restful death I cry."

—SHAKESPEARE : *Sonnet 66*.

WEARY of erring in this desert Life,
Weary of hoping hopes for ever vain,
Weary of struggling in all-sterile strife,
Weary of thought which maketh nothing plain,
I close my eyes and calm my panting breath,
And pray to Thee, O ever-quiet Death !
To come and soothe away my bitter pain.

The strong shall strive,—may they be victors
crowned ;
The wise still seek,—may they at length find
Truth ;
The young still hope,—may purest love be found
To make their age more glorious than their
youth.

* The Three Ladies suggested by the sublime sisterhood of Our Ladies of Sorrow, in the "*Suspiria de Profundis*" of De Quincey.

For me ; my brain is weak, my heart is cold,
My hope and faith long dead ; my life but bold
In jest and laugh to parry hateful ruth.

Over me pass the days and months and years
Like squadrons and battalions of the foe
Trampling with thoughtless thrusts and alien jeers
Over a wounded soldier lying low :
He grips his teeth, or flings them words of scorn
To mar their triumph : but the while, outworn,
Inwardly craves for death to end his woe.

Thus I, in secret, call, O Death ! to Thee,
Thou Youngest of the solemn Sisterhood,
Thou Gentlest of the mighty Sisters Three
Whom I have known so well since first endured
By Love and Grief with vision to discern
What spiritual life doth throb and burn
Through all our world, with evil powers and good.

The Three whom I have known so long, so well,
By intimate communion, face to face,
In every mood, of Earth, of Heaven, of Hell,
In every season and in every place,
That joy of Life has ceased to visit me,
As one estranged by powerful witchery,
Infatuate in a Siren's weird embrace.

114 TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH

First Thou, O priestess, prophetess, and queen,
Our Lady of Beatitudes, first Thou :
Of mighty stature, of seraphic mien,
Upon the tablet of whose broad white brow
Unvanquishable Truth is written clear,
The secret of the mystery of our sphere,
The regnant word of the Eternal Now.

Thou standest garmented in purest white ;
But from thy shoulders wings of power half-spread
Invest thy form with such miraculous light
As dawn may clothe the earth with : and, instead
Of any jewel-kindled golden crown,
The glory of thy long hair flowing down
Is dazzling noonday sunshine round thy head.

Upon a sword thy left hand resteth calm,
A naked sword, two-edged and long and straight ;
A branch of olive with a branch of palm
Thy right hand proffereth to hostile Fate.
The shining plumes that clothe thy feet are bound
By knotted strings, as if to tread the ground
With weary steps when thou wouldst soar elate.

Twin heavens uplifted to the heavens, thine eyes
Are solemn with unutterable thought
And love and aspiration ; yet there lies
Within their light eternal sadness, wrought

TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH 115

By hope deferred and baffled tenderness :
Of all the souls whom thou dost love and bless,
How few revere and love thee as they ought !

Thou leadest heroes from their warfare here
To nobler fields where grander crowns are won ;
Thou leadest sages from this twilight sphere
To cloudless heavens and an unsetting sun ;
Thou leadest saints into that purer air
Whose breath is spiritual life and prayer :
Yet, lo ! they seek thee not, but fear and shun !

Thou takest to thy most maternal breast
Young children from the desert of this earth,
Ere sin hath stained their souls, or grief opprest,
And bearest them unto an heavenly birth,
To be the Vestals of God's Fane above :
And yet their kindred moan against thy love,
With wild and selfish moans in bitter dearth.

Most holy Spirit, first Self-conqueror ;
Thou Victress over Time and Destiny
And Evil, in the all-deciding war
So fierce, so long, so dreadful !—Would that me
Thou hadst upgathered in my life's pure morn !
Unworthy then, less worthy now, forlorn,
I dare not, Gracious Mother, call on Thee.

116 TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH

Next Thou, O sibyl, sorceress and queen,
Our Lady of Annihilation, Thou !
Of mighty stature, of demoniac mien ;
Upon whose swarthy face and livid brow
Are graven deeply anguish, malice, scorn,
Strength ravaged by unrest, resolve forlorn
Of any hope, dazed pride that will not bow.

Thy form is clothed with wings of iron gloom ;
But round about thee, like a chain, is rolled,
Cramping the sway of every mighty plume,
A stark constringent serpent fold on fold :
Of its two heads, one sting is in thy brain,
The other in thy heart ; their venom-pain
Like fire distilling through thee uncontrolled.

A rod of serpents wieldeth thy right hand ;
Thy left a cup of raging fire, whose light
Burns lurid on thyself as thou dost stand ;
Thy lidless eyes tenebriously bright ;
Thy wings, thy vesture, thy dishevelled hair
Dark as the Grave ; thou statue of Despair,
Thou Night essential radiating night.

Thus have I seen thee in thine actual form ;
Not thus can see thee those whom thou dost sway,
Inscrutable Enchantress : young and warm,
Pard-beautiful and brilliant, ever gay ;

TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH 117

Thy cup the very Wine of Life, thy rod
The wand of more voluptuous spells than God
Can wield in Heaven ; thus charmest thou thy prey.

The selfish, fatuous, proud, and pitiless,
• All who have falsified life's royal trust ;
The strong whose strength hath basked in idleness,
The great heart given up to worldly lust,
The great mind destitute of moral faith ;
Thou scourgest down to Night and utter Death,
Or penal spheres of retribution just.

O mighty Spirit, fraudulent and malign,
Demon of madness and perversity !
The evil passions which may make me thine
Are not yet irrepressible in me ;
And I have pierced thy mask of riant youth,
And seen thy form in all its hideous truth :
I will not, Dreadful Mother, call on Thee.

Last Thou, retirèd nun and throneless queen,
Our Lady of Oblivion, last Thou :
Of human stature, of abstracted mien ;
Upon whose pallid face and drooping brow
Are shadowed melancholy dreams of Doom,
And deep absorption into silent gloom,
And weary bearing of the heavy Now.

118 TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH

Thou art all shrouded in a gauzy veil,
Sombrous and cloudlike ; all, except that face
Of subtle loveliness though weirdly pale.

Thy soft, slow-gliding footsteps leave no trace,
And stir no sound. Thy drooping hands infold
Their frail white fingers ; and, unconscious, hold
A poppy-wreath, thine anodyne of grace.

Thy hair is like a twilight round thy head :
Thine eyes are shadowed wells, from Lethe-stream
With drowsy subterranean waters fed ;
Obscurely deep, without a stir or gleam ;
The gazer drinks in from them with his gaze
An opiate charm to curtain all his days,
A passive languor of oblivious dream.

Thou hauntest twilight regions, and the trance
Of moonless nights when stars are few and wan :
Within black woods ; or over the expanse
Of desert seas abysmal ; or upon
Old solitary shores whose populous graves
Are rocked in rest by ever-moaning waves ;
Or through vast ruined cities still and lone.

The weak, the weary, and the desolate,
The poor, the mean, the outcast, the opprest,
All trodden down beneath the march of Fate,
Thou gatherest, loving Sister, to thy breast,

TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH 119

Soothing their pain and weariness asleep ;
Then in thy hidden Dreamland hushed and deep
Dost lay them, shrouded in eternal rest.

O sweetest Sister, and sole Patron Saint
Of all the humble eremites who flee
From out life's crowded tumult, stunned and faint,
To seek a stern and lone tranquillity
In Libyan wastes of time : my hopeless life
With famished yearning craveth rest from strife ;
Therefore, thou Restful One, I call on Thee !

Take me, and lull me into perfect sleep ;
Down, down, far-hidden in thy duskiest cave ;
While all the clamorous years above me sweep
Unheard, or, like the voice of seas that rave
On far-off coasts, but murmuring o'er my trance,
A dim vast monotone, that shall enhance
The restful rapture of the inviolate grave.

Uppgathered thus in thy divine embrace,
Upon mine eyes thy soft mesmeric hand,
While wreaths of opiate odour interlace
About my pulseless brow ; babe-pure and bland,
Passionless, senseless, thoughtless, let me dream
Some ever-slumbrous, never-varying theme,
Within the shadow of thy Timeless Land.

120 TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH

That when I thus have drunk my inmost fill
Of perfect peace, I may arise renewed ;
In soul and body, intellect and will,
Equal to cope with Life whate'er its mood ;
To sway its storm and energise its calm ;
Through rhythmic years evolving like a psalm
Of infinite love and faith and sanctitude.

But if this cannot be, no less I cry,
Come, lead me with thy terrorless control
Down to our Mother's bosom, there to die
By abdication of my separate soul :
So shall this single, self-impelling piece
Of mechanism from lone labour cease,
Resolving into union with the Whole.

Our Mother feedeth thus our little life,
That we in turn may feed her with our death :
The great Sea sways, one interwoven strife,
Wherefrom the Sun exhales a subtle breath,
To float the heavens sublime in form and hue,
Then turning cold and dark in order due
Rain weeping back to swell the Sea beneath.

One part of me shall feed a little worm,
And it a bird on which a man may feed ;
One lime the mould, one nourish insect-sperm ;
One thrill sweet grass, one pulse in bitter weed ;

This swell a fruit, and that evolve in air ;
Another trickle to a springlet's lair,
Another paint a daisy on the mead :

With cosmic interchange of parts for all,
Through all the modes of being numberless
Of every element, as may befall.
And if earth's general soul hath consciousness,
Their new life must with strange new joy be thrilled,
Of perfect law all perfectly fulfilled ;
No sin, no fear, no failure, no excess.

Weary of living isolated life,
Weary of hoping hopes for ever vain,
Weary of struggling in all-sterile strife,
Weary of thought which maketh nothing plain,
I close my eyes and hush my panting breath,
And yearn for Thee, divinely tranquil Death,
To come and soothe away my bitter pain.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

"Per me si va nella città dolente."

—DANTE.

"Poi di tanto adoprar, di tanti moti
D'ogni celeste, ogni terrena cosa,
Girando senza posa,
Per tornar sempre là donde son mosse ;
Uso alcuno, alcun frutto
Indovinar non so."

"Sola nel mondo eterna, a cui si volge
Ogni creata cosa,
In te, morte, si posa
Nostra ignuda natura ;
Lieta no, ma sicura
Dell' antico dolor. . .
Però ch' esser beato
Nega ai mortali e nega a' morti il fato."

—LEOPARDI.

PROEM.

Lo, thus, as prostrate, "In the dust I write
My heart's deep languor and my soul's sad tears."
Yet why evoke the spectres of black night
To blot the sunshine of exultant years?
Why disinter dead faith from mouldering hidden?
Why break the seals of mute despair unbidden,
And wail life's discords into careless ears?

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles
To show the bitter old and wrinkled truth
Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,
False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes
of youth ;
Because it gives some sense of power and passion
In helpless impotence to try to fashion
Our woe in living words howe'er uncouth.

Surely I write not for the hopeful young,
Or those who deem their happiness of worth,
Or such as pasture and grow fat among
The shows of life and feel nor doubt nor dearth,
Or pious spirits with a God above them
To sanctify and glorify and love them,
Or sages who foresee a heaven on earth.

For none of these I write, and none of these
Could read the writing if they deigned to try :
So may they flourish, in their due degrees,
On our sweet earth and in their unplaced sky.
If any cares for the weak words here written, |
It must be some one desolate, Fate-smitten,
Whose faith and hope are dead, and who would die.

Yes, here and there some weary wanderer
In that same city of tremendous night,

124 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

Will understand the speech, and feel a stir
Of fellowship in all-disastrous fight ;
"I suffer mute and lonely, yet another
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother
Travels the same wild paths though out of sight."

O sad Fraternity, do I unfold
Your dolorous mysteries shrouded from of yore ?
Nay, be assured ; no secret can be told
To any who divined it not before :
None uninitiate by many a presage
Will comprehend the language of the message,
Although proclaimed aloud for evermore.

I.

The City is of Night ; perchance of Death,
But certainly of Night ; for never there
Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath
After the dewy dawning's cold grey air ;
The moon and stars may shine with scorn or pity ;
The sun has never visited that city,
For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.

Dissolveth like a dream of night away ;
Though present in distempered gloom of thought
And deadly weariness of heart all day.
But when a dream night after night is brought

Throughout a week, and such weeks few or many
Recur each year for several years, can any
Discern that dream from real life in aught ?

For life is but a dream whose shapes return,
Some frequently, some seldom, some by night
And some by day, some night and day : we learn,
The while all change and many vanish quite,
In their recurrence with recurrent changes
A certain seeming order ; where this ranges
We count things real ; such is memory's might.

A river girds the city west and south,
The main north channel of a broad lagoon,
Regurging with the salt tides from the mouth ;
Waste marshes shine and glister to the moon
For leagues, then moorland black, then stony ridges ;
Great piers and causeways, many noble bridges,
Connect the town and islet suburbs strewn.

Upon an easy slope it lies at large,
And scarcely overlaps the long curved crest
Which swells out two leagues from the river marge.
A trackless wilderness rolls north and west,
Savannahs, savage woods, enormous mountains,
Bleak uplands, black ravines with torrent fountains ;
And eastward rolls the shipless sea's unrest.

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The city is not ruinous, although
Great ruins of an unremembered past,
With others of a few short years ago
More sad, are found within its precincts vast.
The street-lamps always burn; but scarce a casement
In house or palace front from roof to basement
Doth glow or gleam athwart the mirk air cast.

The street-lamps burn amidst the baleful glooms,
Amidst the soundless solitudes immense
Of rangèd mansions dark and still as tombs.
The silence which benumbs or strains the sense
Fulfil with awe the soul's despair unweeping :
Myriads of habitants are ever sleeping,
Or dead, or fled from nameless pestilence !

Yet as in some necropolis you find
Perchance one mourner to a thousand dead,
So there ; worn faces that look deaf and blind
Like tragic masks of stone. With weary tread,
Each wrapt in his own doom, they wander, wander,
Or sit foredone and desolately ponder
Through sleepless hours with heavy drooping
head.

Mature men chiefly, few in age or youth,
A woman rarely, now and then a child :

A child ! If here the heart turns sick with ruth
 To see a little one from birth defiled,
Or lame or blind, as preordained to languish
Through youthless life, think how it bleeds with
 anguish
 To meet one erring in that homeless wild.

They often murmur to themselves, they speak
 To one another seldom, for their woe
Broods maddening inwardly and scorns to wreak
 Itself abroad ; and if at whiles it grow
To frenzy which must rave, none heeds the clamour,
Unless there waits some victim of like glamour,
 To rave in turn, who lends attentive show.

The City is of Night, but not of Sleep ;
 There sweet sleep is not for the weary brain ;
The pitiless hours like years and ages creep,
 A night seems termless hell. This dreadful strain
Of thought and consciousness which never ceases,
Or which some moments' stupor but increases,
 This, worse than woe, makes wretches there in-
 sane.

They leave all hope behind who enter there :
 One certitude while sane they cannot leave,
One anodyne for torture and despair ;
 The certitude of Death, which no reprieve

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Can put off long ; and which, divinely tender,
But waits the outstretched hand to promptly render
That draught whose slumber nothing can be-
reave.*

II.

Because he seemed to walk with an intent
I followed him ; who, shadowlike and frail,
Unswervingly though slowly onward went,
Regardless, wrapt in thought as in a veil :
Thus step for step with lonely sounding feet
We travelled many a long dim silent street.

At length he paused : a black mass in the gloom,
A tower that merged into the heavy sky ;
Around, the huddled stones of grave and tomb :
Some old God's-acre now corruption's sty :
He murmured to himself with dull despair,
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

Then turning to the right went on once more,
And travelled weary roads without suspense ;
And reached at last a low wall's open door,
Whose villa gleamed beyond the foliage dense :

* Though the Garden of thy Life be wholly waste, the sweet flowers withered, the fruit-trees barren, over its wall hang ever the rich dark clusters of the Vine of Death, within easy reach of thy hand, which may pluck of them when it will.

He gazed, and muttered with a hard despair,
Here Love died, stabbed by its own worshipped pair.

Then turning to the right resumed his march,
And travelled streets and lanes with wondrous
strength,
Until on stooping through a narrow arch
We stood before a squalid house at length :
He gazed, and whispered with a cold despair,
Here Hope died, starved out in its utmost lair.

When he had spoken thus, before he stirred,
I spoke, perplexed by something in the signs
Of desolation I had seen and heard
In this drear pilgrimage to ruined shrines :
When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed,
Can Life still live? By what doth it proceed?

As whom his one intense thought overpowers,
He answered coldly, Take a watch, erase
The signs and figures of the circling hours,
Detach the hands, remove the dial-face ;
The works proceed until run down ; although
Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go.

Then turning to the right paced on again,
And traversed squares and travelled streets whose
glooms

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Seemed more and more familiar to my ken ;
And reached that sullen temple of the tombs ;
And paused to murmur with the old despair,
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

I ceased to follow, for the knot of doubt
Was severed sharply with a cruel knife :
He circled thus for ever tracing out
The series of the fraction left of Life ;
Perpetual recurrence in the scope
Of but three terms, dead Faith, dead Love, dead
Hope.*

III.

Although lamps burn along the silent streets ;
Even when moonlight silvers empty squares
The dark holds countless lanes and close retreats ;
But when the night its sphereless mantle wears
The open spaces yawn with gloom abysmal,
The sombre mansions loom immense and dismal,
The lanes are black as subterranean lairs.

And soon the eye a strange new vision learns :
The night remains for it as dark and dense,
Yet clearly in this darkness it discerns
As in the daylight with its natural sense ;

* Life divided by that persistent three = $\frac{LXX}{333} = 210.$

Perceives a shade in shadow not obscurely,
Pursues a stir of black in blackness surely,
Sees spectres also in the gloom intense.

The ear, too, with the silence vast and deep
Becomes familiar though unreconciled ;
Hears breathings as of hidden life asleep,
And muffled throbs as of pent passions wild,
Far murmurs, speech of pity or derision ;
But all more dubious than the things of vision,
So that it knows not when it is beguiled.

No time abates the first despair and awe,
But wonder ceases soon ; the weirdest thing
Is felt least strange beneath the lawless law
Where Death-in-Life is the eternal king ;
Crushed impotent beneath this reign of terror,
Dazed with such mysteries of woe and error,
The soul is too outworn for wondering.

IV.

He stood alone within the spacious square
Declaiming from the central grassy mound,
With head uncovered and with streaming hair,
As if large multitudes were gathered round :
A stalwart shape, the gestures full of might,
The glances burning with unnatural light :—

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As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : All was black,
In heaven no single star, on earth no track ;
A brooding hush without a stir or note,
The air so thick it clotted in my throat ;
And thus for hours ; then some enormous things
Swooped past with savage cries and clanking wings :

But I strode on austere ;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Eyes of fire
Glared at me throbbing with a starved desire ;
The hoarse and heavy and carnivorous breath
Was hot upon me from deep jaws of death ;
Sharp claws, swift talons, fleshless fingers cold
Plucked at me from the bushes, tried to hold :

But I strode on austere ;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Lo you, there,
That hillock burning with a brazen glare ;
Those myriad dusky flames with points a-glow
Which writhed and hissed and darted to and fro ;
A Sabbath of the Serpents, heaped pell-mell
For Devil's roll-call and some *fête* of Hell :

Yet I strode on austere ;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Meteors ran
And crossed their javelins on the black sky-span ;
The zenith opened to a gulf of flame,
The dreadful thunderbolts jarred earth's fixed
frame ;
The ground all heaved in waves of fire that surged
And weltered round me sole there unsubmerged :
Yet I strode on austere ;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Air once more,
And I was close upon a wild sea-shore ;
Enormous cliffs arose on either hand,
The deep tide thundered up a league-broad strand ;
White foambelts seethed there, wan spray swept
and flew ;
The sky broke, moon and stars and clouds and blue :
And I strode on austere ;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : On the left
The sun arose and crowned a broad crag-cleft ;
There stopped and burned out black, except a
rim,
A bleeding eyeless socket, red and dim ;

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Whereon the moon fell suddenly south-west,
And stood above the right-hand cliffs at rest :
Still I strode on austere ;
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : From the right
A shape came slowly with a ruddy light ;
A woman with a red lamp in her hand,
Bareheaded and barefooted on that strand ;
O desolation moving with such grace !
O anguish with such beauty in thy face !
I fell as on my bier,
Hope travailed with such fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : I was twain,
Two selves distinct that cannot join again ;
One stood apart and knew but could not stir,
And watched the other stark in swoon and her ;
And she came on, and never turned aside,
Between such sun and moon and roaring tide :
And as she came more near
My soul grew mad with fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Hell is mild
And piteous matched with that accursèd wild ;

A large black sign was on her breast that bowed,
A broad blackband ran down her snow-white shroud ;
That lamp she held was her own burning heart,
Whose blood-drops trickled step by step apart :

The mystery was clear ;
Mad rage had swallowed fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : By the sea
She knelt and bent above that senseless me ;
Those lamp-drops fell upon my white brow there,
She tried to cleanse them with her tears and hair ;
She murmured words of pity, love, and woe,
She heeded not the level rushing flow :

And mad with rage and fear,
I stood stonebound so near.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : When the tide
Swept up to her there kneeling by my side,
She clasped that corpse-like me, and they were
borne

Away, and this vile me was left forlorn ;
I know the whole sea cannot quench that heart,
Or cleanse that brow, or wash those two apart :

They love ; their doom is drear,
Yet they nor hope nor fear ;
But I, what do I here ?

v.

How he arrives there none can clearly know ;
 Athwart the mountains and immense wild tracts,
Or flung a waif upon that vast sea-flow,
 Or down the river's boiling cataracts :
To reach it is as dying fever-stricken ;
To leave it, slow faint birth intense pangs quicken ;
 And memory swoons in both the tragic acts.

But being there one feels a citizen ;
 Escape seems hopeless to the heart forlorn :
Can Death-in-Life be brought to life again ?
 And yet release does come ; there comes a morn
When he awakes from slumbering so sweetly
That all the world is changed for him completely,
 And he is verily as if new-born.

He scarcely can believe the blissful change,
 He weeps perchance who wept not while accurst ;
Never again will he approach the range
 Infected by that evil spell now burst :
Poor wretch ! who once hath paced that dolent city
Shall pace it often, doomed beyond all pity,
 With horror ever deepening from the first.

Though he possess sweet babes and loving wife,
 A home of peace by loyal friendships cheered,

And love them more than death or happy life,
They shall avail not ; he must dree his weird ;
Renounce all blessings for that imprecation,
Steal forth and haunt that builded desolation,
Of woe and terrors and thick darkness reared :

VI.

I sat forlornly by the river-side,
And watched the bridge-lamps glow like golden
stars
Above the blackness of the swelling tide,
Down which they struck rough gold in ruddier
bars ;
And heard the heave and plashing of the flow
Against the wall a dozen feet below.

Large elm-trees stood along that river-walk ;
And under one, a few steps from my seat,
I heard strange voices join in stranger talk,
Although I had not heard approaching feet :
These bodiless voices in my waking dream
Flowed dark words blending with the sombre
stream :—

And you have after all come back ; come back.
I was about to follow on your track.
And you have failed : our spark of hope is black.

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That I have failed is proved by my return :
The spark is quenched, nor ever more will burn.
But listen ; and the story you shall learn.

I reached the portal common spirits fear,
And read the words above it, dark yet clear,
“Leave hope behind, all ye who enter here :”

And would have passed in, gratified to gain
That positive eternity of pain,
Instead of this insufferable inane.

A demon warder clutched me, Not so fast ;
First leave your hopes behind !—But years have
passed
Since I left all behind me, to the last :

You cannot count for hope, with all your wit,
This bleak despair that drives me to the Pit ;
How could I seek to enter void of it ?

He snarled, What thing is this which apes a soul,
And would find entrance to our gulf of dole
Without the payment of the settled toll ?

Outside the gate he showed an open chest :
Here pay their entrance fees the souls unblest ;
Cast in some hope, you enter with the rest.

This is Pandora's box ; whose lid shall shut,
And Hell-gate too, when hopes have filled it ; but
They are so thin that it will never glut.

I stood a few steps backwards, desolate ;
And watched the spirits pass me to their fate,
And fling off hope, and enter at the gate.

When one casts off a load he springs upright,
Squares back his shoulders, breathes with all his
 might,
And briskly paces forward strong and light :

But these, as if they took some burden, bowed ;
The whole frame sank ; however strong and proud
Before, they crept in quite infirm and cowed.

And as they passed me, earnestly from each
A morsel of his hope I did beseech,
To pay my entrance ; but all mocked my speech.

Not one would cede a tittle of his store,
Though knowing that in instants three or four
He must resign the whole for evermore.

So I returned. Our destiny is fell ;
For in this Limbo we must ever dwell,
Shut out alike from Heaven and Earth and Hell.

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The other sighed back, Yea ; but if we grope
With care through all this Limbo's dreary scope,
We yet may pick up some minute lost hope ;

And, sharing it between us, entrance win,
In spite of fiends so jealous for gross sin :
Let us without delay our search begin.

VII.

Some say that phantoms haunt those shadowy
streets,

And mingle freely there with sparse mankind ;
And tell of ancient woes and black defeats,
And murmur mysteries in the grave enshrined :
But others think them visions of illusion,
Or even men gone far in self-confusion ;
No man there being wholly sane in mind.

And yet a man who raves, however mad,
Who bares his heart and tells of his own fall,
Reserves some inmost secret good or bad :
The phantoms have no reticence at all :
The nudity of flesh will blush though tameless,
The extreme nudity of bone grins shameless,
The unsexed skeleton mocks shroud and pall.

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I have seen phantoms there that were as men
And men that were as phantoms flit and roam ;
Marked shapes that were not living to my ken,
Caught breathings acrid as with Dead Sea foam :
The City rests for man so weird and awful,
That his intrusion there might seem unlawful,
And phantoms there may have their proper home.

VIII.

While I still lingered on that river-walk,
And watched the tide as black as our black
doom,
I heard another couple join in talk,
And saw them to the left hand in the gloom
Seated against an elm bole on the ground,
Their eyes intent upon the stream profound.

“ I never knew another man on earth
But had some joy and solace in his life,
Some chance of triumph in the dreadful strife :
My doom has been unmitigated dearth.”

“ We gaze upon the river, and we note
The various vessels large and small that float,
Ignoring every wrecked and sunken boat.”

“ And yet I asked no splendid dower, no spoil
Of sway or fame or rank or even wealth ;
But homely love with common food and health,
And nightly sleep to balance daily toil.”

“ This all-too humble soul would arrogate
Unto itself some signalising hate
From the supreme indifference of Fate ! ”

“ Who is most wretched in this dolorous place ?
I think myself ; yet I would rather be
My miserable self than He, than He
Who formed such creatures to His own disgrace.

“ The vilest thing must be less vile than Thou
From whom it had its being, God and Lord !
Creator of all woe and sin ! abhorred,
Malignant and implacable ! I vow

“ That not for all Thy power furred and unfurled,
For all the temples to Thy glory built,
Would I assume the ignominious guilt
Of having made such men in such a world.”

“ As if a Being, God or Fiend, could reign,
At once so wicked, foolish, and insane,
As to produce men when He might refrain !

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"The world rolls round for ever like a mill ;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill ;
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

"While air of Space and Time's full river flow
The mill must blindly whirl unresting so :
It may be wearing out, but who can know ?

"Man might know one thing were his sight less
dim ;
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
That it is quite indifferent to him.

"Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith ?
It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,
Then grinds him back into eternal death."

IX.

It is full strange to him who hears and feels,
When wandering there in some deserted street,
The booming and the jar of ponderous wheels,
The trampling clash of heavy ironshod feet :
Who in this Venice of the Black Sea rideth ?
Who in this city of the stars abideth
To buy or sell as those in daylight sweet ?

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The rolling thunder seems to fill the sky
As it comes on ; the horses snort and strain,
The harness jingles, as it passes by ;
The hugeness of an overburthened wain :
A man sits nodding on the shaft or trudges
Three parts asleep beside his fellow-drudges :
And so it rolls into the night again.

What merchandise? whence, whither, and for whom?
Perchance it is a Fate-appointed hearse,
Bearing away to some mysterious tomb
Or Limbo of the scornful universe
The joy, the peace, the life-hope, the abortions
Of all things good which should have been our
portions,
But have been strangled by that City's curse.

x.

The mansion stood apart in its own ground ;
In front thereof a fragrant garden-lawn,
High trees about it, and the whole walled round :
The massy iron gates were both withdrawn ;
And every window of its front shed light,
Portentous in that City of the Night.

But though thus lighted it was deadly still
As all the countless bulks of solid gloom ;

Perchance a congregation to fulfil
Solemnities of silence in this doom,
Mysterious rites of dolour and despair
Permitting not a breath of chant or prayer?

Broad steps ascended to a terrace broad
Whereon lay still light from the open door ;
The hall was noble, and its aspect awed,
Hung round with heavy black from dome to floor ;
And ample stairways rose to left and right
Whose balustrades were also draped with night.

I paced from room to room, from hall to hall,
Nor any life throughout the maze discerned ;
But each was hung with its funereal pall,
And held a shrine, around which tapers burned,
With picture or with statue or with bust,
All copied from the same fair form of dust :

A woman very young and very fair ;
Beloved by bounteous life and joy and youth,
And loving these sweet lovers, so that care
And age and death seemed not for her in sooth :
Alike as stars, all beautiful and bright,
These shapes lit up that mausoléan night.

At length I heard a murmur as of lips,
And reached an open oratory hung

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With heaviest blackness of the whole eclipse ;
 Beneath the dome a fuming censer swung ;
And one lay there upon a low white bed,
With tapers burning at the foot and head :

The Lady of the images : supine,
 Deathstill, lifesweet, with folded palms she lay :
And kneeling there as at a sacred shrine
 A young man wan and worn who seemed to
 pray :
A crucifix of dim and ghostly white
Surmounted the large altar left in night :—

The chambers of the mansion of my heart,
In every one whereof thine image dwells,
Are black with grief eternal for thy sake.

The inmost oratory of my soul,
Wherein thou ever dwellest quick or dead,
Is black with grief eternal for thy sake.

I kneel beside thee and I clasp the cross,
With eyes for ever fixed upon that face,
So beautiful and dreadful in its calm.

I kneel here patient as thou liest there ;
As patient as a statue carved in stone,
Of adoration and eternal grief.

While thou dost not awake I cannot move ;
And something tells me thou wilt never wake,
And I alive feel turning into stone.

Most beautiful were Death to end my grief,
Most hateful to destroy the sight of thee,
Dear vision better than all death or life.

But I renounce all choice of life or death,
For either shall be ever at thy side,
And thus in bliss or woe be ever well.—

He murmured thus and thus in monotone,
Intent upon that uncorrupted face,
Entranced except his moving lips alone :
I glided with hushed footsteps from the place.
This was the festival that filled with light
That palace in the City of the Night.

XI.

What men are they who haunt these fatal glooms,
And fill their living mouths with dust of death,
And make their habitations in the tombs,
And breathe eternal sighs with mortal breath,
And pierce life's pleasant veil of various error
To reach that void of darkness and old terror
Wherein expire the lamps of hope and faith ?

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They have much wisdom yet they are not wise,
They have much goodness yet they do not well,
(The fools we know have their own Paradise,
The wicked also have their proper Hell);
They have much strength but still their doom is
stronger,
Much patience but their time endureth longer,
Much valour but life mocks it with some spell.

They are most rational and yet insane :
An outward madness not to be controlled ;
A perfect reason in the central brain,
Which has no power, but sitteth wan and cold,
And sees the madness, and foresees as plainly
The ruin in its path, and trieth vainly
To cheat itself refusing to behold.

And some are great in rank and wealth and power,
And some renowned for genius and for worth ;
And some are poor and mean, who brood and cower
And shrink from notice, and accept all dearth
Of body, heart and soul, and leave to others
All boons of life : yet these and those are brothers,
The saddest and the weariest men on earth.

XII.

Our isolated units could be brought
To act together for some common end ?

For one by one, each silent with his thought,

I marked a long loose line approach and wend
Athwart the great cathedral's cloistered square,
And slowly vanish from the moonlit air.

Then I would follow in among the last :

And in the porch a shrouded figure stood,
Who challenged each one pausing ere he passed,
With deep eyes burning through a blank white
hood :

Whence come you in the world of life and light
To this our City of Tremendous Night?—

From pleading in a senate of rich lords
For some scant justice to our countless hordes
Who toil half-starved with scarce a human right :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From wandering through many a solemn scene
Of opium visions, with a heart serene
And intellect miraculously bright :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From making hundreds laugh and roar with glee
By my transcendent feats of mimicry,
And humour wanton as an elfish sprite :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

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From prayer and fasting in a lonely cell,
Which brought an ecstasy ineffable
Of love and adoration and delight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From ruling on a splendid kingly throne
A nation which beneath my rule has grown
Year after year in wealth and arts and might :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From preaching to an audience fired with faith
The Lamb who died to save our souls from death,
Whose blood hath washed our scarlet sins wool-
white :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From drinking fiery poison in a den
Crowded with tawdry girls and squalid men,
Who hoarsely laugh and curse and brawl and fight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From picturing with all beauty and all grace
First Eden and the parents of our race,
A luminous rapture unto all men's sight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From writing a great work with patient plan
To justify the ways of God to man,

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And show how ill must fade and perish quite :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From desperate fighting with a little band
Against the powerful tyrants of our land,
To free our brethren in their own despite :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

Thus, challenged by that warder sad and stern,
Each one responded with his countersign,
Then entered the cathedral ; and in turn
I entered also, having given mine ;
But lingered near until I heard no more,
And marked the closing of the massive door.

XIII.

Of all things human which are strange and wild
This is perchance the wildest and most strange,
And showeth man most utterly beguiled,
To those who haunt that sunless City's range ;
That he bemoans himself for aye, repeating
How time is deadly swift, how life is fleeting,
How naught is constant on the earth but change.

The hours are heavy on him and the days ;
The burden of the months he scarce can bear ;

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And often in his secret soul he prays
To sleep through barren periods unaware,
Arousing at some longed-for date of pleasure ;
Which having passed and yielded him small treasure,
He would outsleep another term of care.

Yet in his marvellous fancy he must make
Quick wings for Time, and see it fly from us ;
This Time which crawleth like a monstrous snake,
Wounded and slow and very venomous ;
Which creeps blindwormlike round the earth and
ocean,
Distilling poison at each painful motion,
And seems condemned to circle ever thus.

And since he cannot spend and use aright
The little time here given him in trust,
But wasteth it in weary undelight
Of foolish toil and trouble, strife and lust
He naturally claimeth to inherit
The everlasting Future, that his merit
May have full scope ; as surely is most just.

O length of the intolerable hours,
O nights that are as æons of slow pain,
O Time, too ample for our vital powers,
O Life, whose woeful vanities remain

Immutable for all of all our legions
Through all the centuries and in all the regions,
Not of your speed and variance *we* complain.

We do not ask a longer term of strife,
Weakness and weariness and nameless woes ;
We do not claim renewed and endless life
When this which is our torment here shall close,
An everlasting conscious inanition !
We yearn for speedy death in full fruition,
Dateless oblivion and divine repose.

XIV.

Large glooms were gathered in the mighty fane,
With tinted moongleams slanting here and there ;
And all was hush : no swelling organ-strain,
No chant, no voice or murmuring of prayer ;
No priests came forth, no tinkling censers fumed,
And the high altar space was unillumed.

Around the pillars and against the walls
Leaned men and shadows ; others seemed to
brood
Bent or recumbent in secluded stalls.
Perchance they were not a great multitude
Save in that city of so lonely streets
Where one may count up every face he meets.

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All patiently awaited the event

Without a stir or sound, as if no less
Self-occupied, doomstricken, while attent.

And then we heard a voice of solemn stress
From the dark pulpit, and our gaze there met
Two eyes which burned as never eyes burned yet :

Two steadfast and intolerable eyes

Burning beneath a broad and rugged brow ;
The head behind it of enormous size.

And as black fir-groves in a large wind bow,
Our rooted congregation, gloom-arrayed,
By that great sad voice deep and full were swayed :—

O melancholy Brothers, dark, dark, dark !

O battling in black floods without an ark !

O spectral wanderers of unholy Night !
My soul hath bled for you these sunless years,
With bitter blood-drops running down like tears :
Oh, dark, dark, dark, withdrawn from joy and light !

My heart is sick with anguish for your bale ;
Your woe hath been my anguish ; yea, I quail

And perish in your perishing unblest.
And I have searched the highths and depths, the
scope

Of all our universe, with desperate hope
To find some solace for your wild unrest.

And now at last authentic word I bring,
Witnessed by every dead and living thing ;
 Good tidings of great joy for you, for all :
There is no God ; no Fiend with names divine
Made us and tortures us ; if we must pine,
 It is to satiate no Being's gall.

It was the dark delusion of a dream,
That living Person conscious and supreme,
 Whom we must curse for cursing us with life ;
Whom we must curse because the life He gave
Could not be buried in the quiet grave,
 Could not be killed by poison or by knife.

This little life is all we must endure,
The grave's most holy peace is ever sure,
 We fall asleep and never wake again ;
Nothing is of us but the mouldering flesh,
Whose elements dissolve and merge afresh
 In earth, air, water, plants, and other men.

We finish thus ; and all our wretched race
Shall finish with its cycle, and give place
 To other beings, with their own time-doom :
Infinite æons ere our kind began ;
Infinite æons after the last man
 Has joined the mammoth in earth's tomb and
 womb.

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We bow down to the universal laws,
Which never had for man a special clause
Of cruelty or kindness, love or hate :
If toads and vultures are obscene to sight,
If tigers burn with beauty and with might,
Is it by favour or by wrath of fate ?

All substance lives and struggles evermore
Through countless shapes continually at war,
By countless interactions interknit :
If one is born a certain day on earth,
All times and forces tended to that birth,
Not all the world could change or hinder it.

I find no hint throughout the Universe
Of good or ill, of blessing or of curse ;
I find alone Necessity Supreme ;
With infinite Mystery, abysmal, dark,
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark
For us the flitting shadows of a dream.

O Brothers of sad lives ! they are so brief ;
A few short years must bring us all relief :
Can we not bear these years of labouring breath ?
But if you would not this poor life fulfil,
Lo, you are free to end it when you will,
Without the fear of waking after death.—

The organ-like vibrations of his voice
 Thrilled through the vaulted aisles and died away;
The yearning of the tones which bade rejoice
 Was sad and tender as a requiem lay :
Our shadowy congregation rested still
As brooding on that "End it when you will."

XV.

Wherever men are gathered, all the air
 Is charged with human feeling, human thought ;
Each shout and cry and laugh, each curse and
 prayer,
 Are into its vibrations surely wrought ;
Unspoken passion, wordless meditation,
Are breathed into it with our respiration ;
 It is with our life fraught and overfraught.

So that no man there breathes earth's simple breath,
 As if alone on mountains or wide seas ;
But nourishes warm life or hastens death
 With joys and sorrows, health and foul disease,
Wisdom and folly, good and evil labours,
Incessant of his multitudinous neighbours ;
 He in his turn affecting all of these.

That City's atmosphere is dark and dense,
 Although not many exiles wander there,

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With many a potent evil influence,
Each adding poison to the poisoned air ;
Infections of unutterable sadness,
Infections of incalculable madness,
Infections of incurable despair.

XVI.

Our shadowy congregation rested still,
As musing on that message we had heard
And brooding on that "End it when you will ;"
Perchance awaiting yet some other word ;
When keen as lightning through a muffled sky
Sprang forth a shrill and lamentable cry :—

The man speaks sooth, alas ! the man speaks sooth :
We have no personal life beyond the grave ;
There is no God ; Fate knows nor wrath nor ruth :
Can I find here the comfort which I crave ?

In all eternity I had one chance,
One few years' term of gracious human life :
The splendours of the intellect's advance,
The sweetness of the home with babes and wife ;

The social pleasures with their genial wit ;
The fascination of the worlds of art,
The glories of the worlds of nature, lit
By large imagination's glowing heart ;

The rapture of mere being, full of health ;
The careless childhood and the ardent youth,
The strenuous manhood winning various wealth,
The reverend age serene with life's long truth :

All the sublime prerogatives of Man ;
The storied memories of the times of old,
The patient tracking of the world's great plan
Through sequences and changes myriadfold.

This chance was never offered me before ;
For me the infinite Past is blank and dumb :
This chance recurreth never, nevermore ;
Blank, blank for me the infinite To-come.

And this sole chance was frustrate from my birth,
A mockery, a delusion ; and my breath
Of noble human life upon this earth
So racks me that I sigh for senseless death.

My wine of life is poison mixed with gall,
My noonday passes in a nightmare dream,
I worse than lose the years which are my all :
What can console me for the loss supreme ?

Speak not of comfort where no comfort is,
Speak not at all : can words make foul things
fair ?

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Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss :
Hush and be mute envisaging despair.—

This vehement voice came from the northern aisle
Rapid and shrill to its abrupt harsh close ;
And none gave answer for a certain while,
For words must shrink from these most wordless
woes ;
At last the pulpit speaker simply said,
With humid eyes and thoughtful drooping head :—

My Brother, my poor Brothers, it is thus ;
This life itself holds nothing good for us,
But it ends soon and nevermore can be ;
And we knew nothing of it ere our birth,
And shall know nothing when consigned to earth :
I ponder these thoughts and they comfort me.

XVII.

How the moon triumphs through the endless
nights !
How the stars throb and glitter as they wheel
Their thick processions of supernal lights
Around the blue vault obdurate as steel !
And men regard with passionate awe and yearning
The mighty marching and the golden burning,
And think the heavens respond to what they feel.

Boats gliding like dark shadows of a dream,
Are glorified from vision as they pass
The quivering moonbridge on the deep black
stream ;
Cold windows kindle their dead glooms of
glass
To restless crystals ; cornice, dome, and column
Emerge from chaos in the splendour solemn ;
Like faëry lakes gleam lawns of dewy grass.

With such a living light these dead eyes shine,
These eyes of sightless heaven, that as we
gaze
We read a pity, tremulous, divine,
Or cold majestic scorn in their pure rays :
Fond man ! they are not haughty, are not tender ;
There is no heart or mind in all their splendour,
They thread mere puppets all their marvellous
maze.

If we could near them with the flight unflown,
We should but find them worlds as sad as this,
Or suns all self-consuming like our own
Enringed by planet worlds as much amiss :
They wax and wane through fusion and confusion ;
The spheres eternal are a grand illusion,
The empyréan is a void abyss.

XVIII.

I wandered in a suburb of the north,
 And reached a spot whence three close lanes led
 down,
 Beneath thick trees and hedgerows winding forth
 Like deep brook channels, deep and dark and
 lown :
 The air above was wan with misty light,
 The dull grey south showed one vague blur of white.

I took the left-hand lane and slowly trod
 Its earthen footpath, brushing as I went
 The humid leafage ; and my feet were shod
 With heavy languor, and my frame downbent,
 With infinite sleepless weariness outworn,
 So many nights I thus had paced forlorn.

After a hundred steps I grew aware
 Of something crawling in the lane below ;
 It seemed a wounded creature prostrate there
 That sobbed with pangs in making progress slow,
 The hind limbs stretched to push, the fore limbs
 then
 To drag ; for it would die in its own den.

But coming level with it I discerned
 That it had been a man ; for at my tread

It stopped in its sore travail and half-turned,
 Leaning upon its right, and raised its head,
And with the left hand twitched back as in ire
Long grey unreverend locks befouled with mire.

A haggard filthy face with bloodshot eyes,
 An infamy for manhood to behold.
He gasped all trembling, What, you want my
 prize?

 You leave, to rob me, wine and lust and gold
And all that men go mad upon, since you
Have traced my sacred secret of the clue?

You think that I am weak and must submit ;
 Yet I but scratch you with this poisoned blade,
And you are dead as if I clove with it
 That false fierce greedy heart. Betrayed ! be-
 trayed !

I fling this phial if you seek to pass,
And you are forthwith shrivelled up like grass.

And then with sudden change, Take thought !
 take thought !

 Have pity on me ! it is mine alone.
If you could find, it would avail you naught ;
 Seek elsewhere on the pathway of your own :
For who of mortal or immortal race
The lifetrack of another can retrace?

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Did you but know my agony and toil !

Two lanes diverge up yonder from this lane ;
My thin blood marks the long length of their soil ;

Such clue I left, who sought my clue in vain :
My hands and knees are worn both flesh and bone ;
I cannot move but with continual moan.

But I am in the very way at last

To find the long-lost broken golden thread
Which reunites my present with my past,

If you but go your own way. And I said,
I will retire as soon as you have told
Whereunto leadeth this lost thread of gold.

And so you know it not ! he hissed with scorn ;

I feared you, imbecile ! It leads me back
From this accursed night without a morn,

And through the deserts which have else no
track,

And through vast wastes of horror-haunted time,
To Eden innocence in Eden's clime :

And I become a nursling soft and pure,

An infant cradled on its mother's knee,
Without a past, love-cherished and secure ;

Which if it saw this loathsome present Me,
Would plunge its face into the pillowing breast,
And scream abhorrence hard to lull to rest.

He turned to grope ; and I retiring brushed
Thin shreds of gossamer from off my face,
And mused, His life would grow, the germ uncrushed ;
He should to antenatal night retrace,
And hide his elements in that large womb
Beyond the reach of man-evolving Doom.

And even thus, what weary way were planned,
To seek oblivion through the far-off gate
Of birth, when that of death is close at hand !
For this is law, if law there be in Fate :
What never has been, yet may have its when ;
The thing which has been, never is again.

XIX.

The mighty river flowing dark and deep,
With ebb and flood from the remote sea-tides
Vague-sounding through the City's sleepless sleep,
Is named the River of the Suicides ;
For night by night some lorn wretch overweary,
And shuddering from the future yet more dreary,
Within its cold secure oblivion hides.

One plunges from a bridge's parapet,
As by some blind and sudden frenzy hurled ;
Another wades in slow with purpose set
Until the waters are above him furled ;

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Another in a boat with dreamlike motion
Glides drifting down into the desert ocean,
To starve or sink from out the desert world.

They perish from their suffering surely thus,
For none beholding them attempts to save,
The while each thinks how soon, solicitous,
He may seek refuge in the self-same wave ;
Some hour when tired of ever-vain endurance
Impatience will forerun the sweet assurance
Of perfect peace eventual in the grave.

When this poor tragic-farce has palled us long,
Why actors and spectators do we stay?—
To fill our so-short *rôles* out right or wrong ;
To see what shifts are yet in the dull play
For our illusion ; to refrain from grieving
Dear foolish friends by our untimely leaving :
But those asleep at home, how blest are they !

Yet it is but for one night after all :
What matters one brief night of dreary pain ?
When after it the weary eyelids fall
Upon the weary eyes and wasted brain ;
And all sad scenes and thoughts and feelings vanish
In that sweet sleep no power can ever banish,
That one best sleep which never wakes again.

XX.

I sat me weary on a pillar's base,
And leaned against the shaft; for broad moonlight
O'erflowed the peacefulness of cloistered space,
A shore of shadow slanting from the right :
The great cathedral's western front stood there,
A wave-worn rock in that calm sea of air.

Before it, opposite my place of rest,
Two figures faced each other, large, austere ;
A couchant sphinx in shadow to the breast,
An angel standing in the moonlight clear ;
So mighty by magnificence of form,
They were not dwarfed beneath that mass enorm.

Upon the cross-hilt of a naked sword
The angel's hands, as prompt to smite, were held ;
His vigilant intense regard was poured
Upon the creature placidly unquelled,
Whose front was set at level gaze which took
No heed of aught, a solemn trance-like look.

And as I pondered these opposed shapes
My eyelids sank in stupor, that dull swoon
Which drugs and with a leaden mantle drapes
The outworn to worse weariness. But soon

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A sharp and clashing noise the stillness broke,
And from the evil lethargy I woke.

The angel's wings had fallen, stone on stone,
And lay there shattered; hence the sudden
sound:

A warrior leaning on his sword alone
Now watched the sphinx with that regard profound;
The sphinx unchanged looked forthright, as aware
Of nothing in the vast abyss of air.

Again I sank in that repose unsweet,
Again a clashing noise my slumber rent;
The warrior's sword lay broken at his feet:
An unarmed man with raised hands impotent
Now stood before the sphinx, which ever kept
Such mien as if with open eyes it slept.

My eyelids sank in spite of wonder grown;
A louder crash upstartled me in dread:
The man had fallen forward, stone on stone,
And lay there shattered, with his trunkless head
Between the monster's large quiescent paws,
Beneath its grand front changeless as life's laws.

The moon had circled westward full and bright,
And made the temple-front a mystic dream,

And bathed the whole enclosure with its light,
The sworded angel's wrecks, the sphinx supreme :
I pondered long that cold majestic face
Whose vision seemed of infinite void space.

XXI.

Anear the centre of that northern crest
Stands out a level upland bleak and bare,
From which the city east and south and west
Sinks gently in long waves ; and thronèd there
An Image sits, stupendous, superhuman,
The bronze colossus of a wingèd Woman,
Upon a graded granite base foursquare.

Low-seated she leans forward massively,
With cheek on clenched left hand, the forearm's
might
Erect, its elbow on her rounded knee ;
Across a clasped book in her lap the right
Upholds a pair of compasses ; she gazes
With full set eyes, but wandering in thick mazes
Of sombre thought beholds no outward sight.

Words cannot picture her ; but all men know
That solemn sketch the pure sad artist wrought
Three centuries and threescore years ago,
With phantasies of his peculiar thought :

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The instruments of carpentry and science
Scattered about her feet, in strange alliance
With the keen wolf-hound sleeping undistraught ;

Scales, hour-glass, bell, and magic-square above ;
The grave and solid infant perched beside,
With open winglets that might bear a dove,
Intent upon its tablets, heavy-eyed ;
Her folded wings as of a mighty eagle,
But all too impotent to lift the regal
Robustness of her earth-born strength and pride ;

And with those wings, and that light wreath which
seems

To mock her grand head and the knotted frown
Of forehead charged with baleful thoughts and
dreams,

The household bunch of keys, the housewife's
gown

Voluminous, indented, and yet rigid
As if a shell of burnished metal frigid,
The feet thick shod to tread all weakness down ;

The comet hanging o'er the waste dark seas,
The massy rainbow curved in front of it,
Beyond the village with the masts and trees ;
The snaky imp, dog-headed, from the Pit,

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Bearing upon its batlike leathern pinions
Her name unfolded in the sun's dominions,
The "MELENCOLIA" that transcends all wit.

Thus has the artist copied her, and thus
Surrounded to expound her form sublime,
Her fate heroic and calamitous ;
Fronting the dreadful mysteries of Time,
Unvanquished in defeat and desolation,
Undaunted in the hopeless conflagration
Of the day setting on her baffled prime.

Baffled and beaten back she works on still,
Weary and sick of soul she works the more,
Sustained by her indomitable will :
The hands shall fashion and the brain shall pore
And all her sorrow shall be turned to labour,
Till death the friend-foe piercing with his sabre
That mighty heart of hearts ends bitter war.

But as if blacker night could dawn on night,
With tenfold gloom on moonless night unstarred,
A sense more tragic than defeat and blight,
More desperate than strife with hope debarred,
More fatal than the adamant Never
Encompassing her passionate endeavour,
Dawns glooming in her tenebrous regard :

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The sense that every struggle brings defeat
Because Fate holds no prize to crown success ;
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
Because they have no secret to express ;
That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
Because there is no light beyond the curtain ;
That all is vanity and nothingness.

Titanic from her high throne in the north,
That City's sombre Patroness and Queen,
In bronze sublimity she gazes forth
Over her Capital of teen and threne,
Over the river with its isles and bridges,
The marsh and moorland, to the stern rock-ridges,
Confronting them with a coëval mien.

The moving moon and stars from east to west
Circle before her in the sea of air ;
Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
Her subjects often gaze up to her there :
The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
The weak new terrors ; all, renewed assurance
And confirmation of the old despair.

1870-1874.

IN THE ROOM

"Ceste insigne fable et tragicque comedie."—RABELAIS.

I.

THE sun was down, and twilight grey
Filled half the air ; but in the room,
Whose curtain had been drawn all day,
The twilight was a dusky gloom :
Which seemed at first as still as death,
And void ; but was indeed all rife
With subtle thrills, the pulse and breath
Of multitudinous lower life.

II.

In their abrupt and headlong way
Bewildered flies for light had dashed
Against the curtain all the day,
And now slept wintrily abashed ;
And nimble mice slept, wearied out
With such a double night's uproar ;
But solid beetles crawled about
The chilly hearth and naked floor.

III.

And so throughout the twilight hour
That vaguely murmurous hush and rest
There brooded ; and beneath its power
Life throbbing held its throbs suppress :
Until the thin-voiced mirror sighed,
I am all blurred with dust and damp,
So long ago the clear day died,
So long has gleamed nor fire nor lamp.

IV.

Whereon the curtain murmured back,
Some change is on us, good or ill ;
Behind me and before is black
As when those human things lie still :
But I have seen the darkness grow
As grows the daylight every morn ;
Have felt out there long shine and glow,
In here long chilly dusk forlorn.

V.

The cupboard grumbled with a groan,
Each new day worse starvation brings :
Since *he* came here I have not known
Or sweets or cates or wholesome things :
But now ! a pinch of meal, a crust,
Throughout the week is all I get.

I am so empty ; it is just
As when they said we were to let.

VI.

What is become, then, of our Man?
The petulant old glass exclaimed ;
If all this time he slumber can,
He really ought to be ashamed.
I wish we had our Girl again,
So gay and busy, bright and fair :
The girls are better than these men,
Who only for their dull selves care.

VII.

It is so many hours ago—
The lamp and fire were both alight—
I saw him pacing to and fro,
Perturbing restlessly the night.
His face was pale to give one fear,
His eyes when lifted looked too bright ;
He muttered ; what, I could not hear :
Bad words though ; something was not right.

VIII.

The table said, He wrote so long
That I grew weary of his weight ;
The pen kept up a cricket song,
It ran and ran at such a rate :

And in the longer pauses he
With both his folded arms downpressed
And stared as one who does not see,
Or sank his head upon his breast.

IX.

The fire-grate said, I am as cold
As if I never had a blaze ;
The few dead cinders here I hold,
I held unburned for days and days.
Last night he made them flare ; but still
What good did all his writing do ?
Among my ashes curl and thrill
Thin ghosts of all those papers too.

X.

The table answered, Not quite all ;
He saved and folded up one sheet,
And sealed it fast, and let it fall ;
And here it lies now white and neat.
Whereon the letter's whisper came,
My writing is closed up too well ;
Outside there's not a single name,
And who should read me I can't tell.

XI.

The mirror sneered with scornful spite,
(That ancient crack which spoiled her looks

Had marred her temper), Write and write !
And read those stupid, worn-out books !
That's all he does, read, write, and read,
And smoke that nasty pipe which stinks :
He never takes the slightest heed
How any of us feels or thinks.

XII.

But Lucy fifty times a day
Would come and smile here in my face,
Adjust a tress that curled astray,
Or tie a ribbon with more grace :
She looked so young and fresh and fair,
She blushed with such a charming bloom,
It did one good to see her there,
And brightened all things in the room.

XIII.

She did not sit hours stark and dumb
As pale as moonshine by the lamp ;
To lie in bed when day was come,
And leave us curtained chill and damp.
She slept away the dreary dark,
And rose to greet the pleasant morn ;
And sang as gaily as a lark
While busy as the flies sun-born.

XIV.

And how she loved us every one ;
And dusted this and mended that,
With trills and laughs and freaks of fun,
And tender scoldings in her chat !
And then her bird, that sang as shrill
As she sang sweet ; her darling flowers
That grew there in the window-sill,
Where she would sit at work for hours.

XV.

It was not much she ever wrote ;
Her fingers had good work to do ;
Say, once a week a pretty note ;
And very long it took her too.
And little more she read, I wis ;
Just now and then a pictured sheet,
Besides those letters she would kiss
And croon for hours, they were so sweet.

XVI.

She had her friends too, blithe young girls,
Who whispered, babbled, laughed, caressed,
And romped and danced with dancing curls,
And gave our life a joyous zest.

But with this dullard, glum and sour,
Not one of all his fellow-men
Has ever passed a social hour ;
We might be in some wild beast's den.

XVII.

This long tirade aroused the bed,
Who spoke in deep and ponderous bass,
Befitting that calm life he led,
As if firm-rooted in his place :
In broad majestic bulk alone,
As in thrice venerable age,
He stood at once the royal throne,
The monarch, the experienced sage :

XVIII.

I know what is and what has been ;
Not anything to me comes strange,
Who in so many years have seen
And lived through every kind of change.
I know when men are good or bad,
When well or ill, he slowly said ;
When sad or glad, when sane or mad,
And when they sleep alive or dead.

XIX.

At this last word of solemn lore
A tremor circled through the gloom,

As if a crash upon the floor
Had jarred and shaken all the room :
For nearly all the listening things
Were old and worn, and knew what curse
Of violent change death often brings,
From good to bad, from bad to worse ;

XX.

They get to know each other well,
To feel at home and settled down ;
Death bursts among them like a shell,
And strews them over all the town.
The bed went on, This man who lies
Upon me now is stark and cold ;
He will not any more arise,
And do the things he did of old.

XXI.

But we shall have short peace or rest ;
For soon up here will come a rout,
And nail him in a queer long chest,
And carry him like luggage out.
They will be muffled all in black,
And whisper much, and sigh and weep :
But he will never more come back,
And some one else in me must sleep.

XXII.

Thereon a little phial shrilled,
Here empty on the chair I lie :
I heard one say, as I was filled,
With half of this a man would die.
The man there drank me with slow breath,
And murmured, Thus ends barren strife :
O sweeter, thou cold wine of death,
Than ever sweet warm wine of life.

XXIII.

One of my cousins long ago,
A little thing, the mirror said,
Was carried to a couch to show,
Whether a man was really dead.
Two great improvements marked the case :
He did not blur her with his breath,
His many-wrinkled, twitching face
Was smooth old ivory : verdict, Death.—

XXIV.

It lay, the lowest thing there, lulled
Sweet-sleep-like in corruption's truce ;
The form whose purpose was annulled,
While all the other shapes meant use.

It lay, the *he* become now *it*,
Unconscious of the deep disgrace,
Unanxious how its parts might flit
Through what new forms in time and space.

XXV.

It lay and preached, as dumb things do,
More powerfully than tongues can prate ;
Though life be torture through and through,
Man is but weak to plain of fate :
The drear path crawls on drearier still
To wounded feet and hopeless breast ?
Well, he can lie down when he will,
And straight all ends in endless rest.

XXVI.

And while the black night nothing saw,
And till the cold morn came at last,
That old bed held the room in awe
With tales of its experience vast.
It thrilled the gloom ; it told such tales
Of human sorrows and delights,
Of fever moans and infant wails,
Of births and deaths and bridal nights.

SUNDAY UP THE RIVER *

AN IDYLL OF COCKAIGNE

" En allant promener aux champs,
J'y ai trouvé les blés si grands,
Les aubépines florissant.
En vérité, en vérité,
C'est le mois, le joli mois,
C'est le joli mois de mai.

" Dieu veuill' garder les vins, les blés,
Les jeunes filles à marier,
Les jeun' garçons pour les aimer !
En vérité, en vérité,
C'est le mois, le joli mois,
C'est le joli mois de mai."

—*Carol of Lorraine.*†

I.

I LOOKED out into the morning,
I looked out into the west :
The soft blue eye of the quiet sky
Still drooped in dreamy rest ;

* Reprinted from *Fraser's Magazine*, October 1869, with the kind assent of Messrs. Longmans & Co.

† From Victor Fournel's charming book, "*Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris.*"

The trees were still like clouds there,
 The clouds like mountains dim ;
 The broad mist lay, a silver bay
 Whose tide was at the brim.

I looked out into the morning,
 I looked out into the east :
 The flood of light upon the night
 Had silently increased ;

The sky was pale with fervour,
 The distant trees were grey,
 The hill-lines drawn like waves of dawn
 Dissolving in the day.

I looked out into the morning ;
 Looked east, looked west, with glee :
 O richest day of happy May,
 My love will spend with me !

II.

" Oh, what are you waiting for here, young man ?
 What are you looking for over the bridge ? "
 A little straw hat with the streaming blue ribbons
 Is soon to come dancing over the bridge.

Her heart beats the measure that keeps her feet
dancing,
Dancing along like a wave o' the sea ;
Her heart pours the sunshine with which her eyes
glancing
Light up strange faces in looking for me.

The strange faces brighten in meeting her glances ;
The strangers all bless her, pure, lovely, and
free :
She fancies she walks, but her walk skips and
dances,
Her heart makes such music in coming to me.

Oh, thousands and thousands of happy young
maidens
Are tripping this morning their sweethearts to
see ;
But none whose heart beats to a sweeter love-
cadence
Than hers who will brighten the sunshine for me.

"Oh, what are you waiting for here, young man ?
What are you looking for over the bridge ?"
A little straw hat with the streaming blue ribbons ;
—And here it comes dancing over the bridge !

III.

In the vast vague grey,
Mistily luminous, brightly dim,
The trees to the south there, far away,
Float as beautiful, strange and grand
As pencilled palm-trees, every line
Mystic with a grace divine,
In our dreams of the holy Eastern Land.

There is not a cloud in the sky ;
 The vague vast grey
Melts into azure dim on high.
Warmth, and languor, and infinite peace !
 Surely the young Day
Hath fallen into a vision and a trance,
And his burning flight doth cease.

Yet look how here and there
Soft curves, fine contours, seem to swim,
Half emerging, wan and dim,
 Into the quiet air :
Like statues growing slowly, slowly out
From the great vault of marble ; here a limb,
And there a feature, but the rest all doubt.

Then the sculpturing sunbeams smite,
 And the forms start forth to the day ;

And the breath of the morning sweepeth light
 The luminous dust away :
 And soon, soon, soon,
 Crowning the floor of the land and the sea,
 Shall be wrought the dome of Noon.

The burning sapphire dome,
 With solemn imagery ; vast shapes that stand
 Each like an island ringed with flashing foam,
 Black-purple mountains, creeks and rivers of light,
 Crag of cleft crystal blazing to the crest :
 Vast isles that move, that roam
 A tideless sea of infinite fathomless rest.

Thus shall it be this noon :
 And thus, so slowly, slowly from its birth
 In the long night's dark swoon,
 Through the long morning's trance, sweet, vague,
 and dim,
 The Sun divine above
 Doth build up in us, Heaven completing Earth,
 Our solemn Noon of Love.

IV.

The church bells are ringing :
 How green the earth, how fresh and fair !
 The thrushes are singing :
 What rapture but to breathe this air !

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The church bells are ringing :

Lo, how the river dreameth there !

The thrushes are singing :

Green flames wave lightly everywhere !

The church bells are ringing :

How all the world breathes praise and prayer !

The thrushes are singing :

What Sabbath peace doth trance the air !

v.

I love all hardy exercise

That makes one strain and quiver ;

And best of all I love and prize

This boating on our river.

I to row and you to steer,

Gay shall be Life's trip, my dear :

You to steer and I to row,

All is bright where'er we go.

We push off from the bank ; again

We're free upon the waters ;

The happiest of the sons of men,

The fairest of earth's daughters.

And I row, and I row ;

The blue floats above us as we go :

And you steer, and you steer,

Framed in gliding wood and water, O my dear

I pull a long calm mile or two,
 Pull slowly, deftly feather :
 How sinful *any* work to do
 In this Italian weather !
 Yet I row, yet I row ;
 The blue floats above us as we go :
 While you steer, while you steer,
 Framed in gliding wood and water, O my dear.

Those lovely breadths of lawn that sweep
 Adown in still green billows !
 And o'er the brim in fountains leap ;
 Green fountains, weeping willows !
 And I row, and I row ;
 The blue floats above us as we go :
 And you steer, and you steer,
 Framed in gliding wood and water, O my dear.

We push among the flags in flower,
 Beneath the branches tender,
 And we are in a faerie bower
 Of green and golden splendour.
 I to row and you to steer,
 Gay must be Life's trip, my dear ;
 You to steer and I to row,
 All is bright where'er we go.

A secret bower where we can hide
 In lustrous shadow lonely ;

The crystal floor may lap and glide
 To rock our dreaming only.
 I to row and you to steer,
 Gay must be Life's trip, my dear ;
 You to steer and I to row,
 All is bright where'er we go.

VI.

I love this hardy exercise,
 This strenuous toil of boating :
 Our skiff beneath the willow lies
 Half stranded and half floating.
 As I lie, as I lie,
 Glimpses dazzle of the blue and burning sky ;
 As you lean, as you lean,
 Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

My shirt is of the soft red wool,
 My cap is azure braided
 By two white hands so beautiful,
 My tie mauve purple-shaded.
 As I lie, as I lie,
 Glimpses dazzle of white clouds and sapphire
 sky ;
 As you lean, as you lean,
 Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

Your hat with long blue streamers decked,
 Your pure throat crimson-banded ;
 White-robed, my own white dove unflecked,
 Dove-footed, lilac-handed.
 As I lie, as I lie,
 Glimpses dazzle of white clouds and sapphire
 sky ;
 As you lean, as you lean,
 Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

If any boaters boating past
 Should look where we're reclining,
 They'll say, To-day green willows glassed
 Rubies and sapphires shining !
 As I lie, as I lie,
 Glimpses dazzle of the blue and burning sky ;
 As you lean, as you lean,
 Faerie Princess of the secret faerie scene.

VII.

Grey clouds come puffing from my lips
 And hang there softly curling,
 While from the bowl now leaps, now slips,
 A steel-blue thread high twirling.
 As I lie, as I lie,
 The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
 As you lean, as you lean,
 In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

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I gaze on you and I am crowned,
 A Monarch great and glorious,
A Hero in all realms renowned,
 A Faerie Prince victorious.
 As I lie, as I lie,
 The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
 As you lean, as you lean,
 In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

Your violet eyes pour out their whole
 Pure light in earnest rapture ;
Your thoughts come dreaming through my soul,
 And nestle past recapture.
 As I lie, as I lie,
 The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
 As you lean, as you lean,
 In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

O friends, your best years to the oar
 Like galley-slaves devoting,
This is and shall be evermore
 The true sublime of boating !
 As I lie, as I lie,
 The hours fold their wings beneath the sky ;
 As you lean, as you lean,
 In that trance of perfect love and bliss serene.

VIII.

The water is cool and sweet and pure,
 The water is clear as crystal ;
 And water's a noble liquid, sure ;—
 But look at my pocket-pistol !

Tim Boyland gave it me, one of two
 The rogue brought back from Dublin ;
 With a jar of the genuine stuff : hurroo !
 How deliciously it comes bubblin' !

It is not brandy, it is not wine,
 It is Jameson's Irish Whisky :
 It fills the heart with joy divine,
 And it makes the fancy frisky.

All other spirits are vile resorts,
 Except its own Scotch first cousin ;
 And as for your Clarets and Sherries and Ports,
 A naggin is worth a dozen.

I have watered this, though a toothful neat
 Just melts like cream down the throttle :
 But it's grand in the punch, hot, strong, and sweet :
 Not a headache in a bottle.

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It is amber as the western skies
 When the sunset glows serenest ;
It is mellow as the mild moonrise
 When the shamrock leaves fold greenest.

Just a little, wee, wee, tiny sip !
 Just the wet of the bill of a starling !
A drop of dew for the rosy lip,
 And two stars in the eyes of my darling !

'Faith your kiss has made it so sweet at the brim
 I could go on supping for ever !
We'll pocket the pistol : And Tim, you limb,
 May this *craturr* abandon you never !

IX.

Like violets pale i' the Spring o' the year
 Came my Love's sad eyes to my youth ;
Wan and dim with many a tear,
 But the sweeter for that in sooth :
 Wet and dim,
 Tender and true,
 Violet eyes
 Of the sweetest blue.

Like pansies dark i' the June o' the year
 Grow my Love's glad eyes to my prime ;

Rich with the purple splendour clear
 Of their thoughtful bliss sublime :
 Deep and dark,
 Solemn and true,
 Pansy eyes
 Of the noblest blue.

X.

Were I a real Poet, I would sing
 Such joyous songs of you, and all mere truth ;
 As true as buds and tender leaves in Spring,
 As true as lofty dreams in dreamful youth ;
 That men should cry : How foolish every one
 Who thinks the world is getting out of tune !
 Where is the tarnish in our golden sun ?
 Where is the clouding in our crystal moon ?
 The lark sings now the eversame new song
 With which it soared through Eden's purest skies ;
 This poet's music doth for us prolong
 The very speech Love learnt in Paradise ;
 This maiden is as young and pure and fair
 As Eve agaze on Adam sleeping there.

XI.

When will you have not a sole kiss left,
 And my prodigal mouth be all bereft ?

When your lips have ravished the last sweet flush
Of the red with which the roses blush :
Now I kiss them and kiss them till they hush.

When will you have not a glance to give
Of the love in whose lustre my glances live ?
When, O my darling, your fathomless eyes
Have drawn all the azure out of the skies :
Now I gaze and I gaze till they dare not rise.

When will you find not a single vow
Of the myriads and myriads you lavish now ?
When your voice has gurgled the last sweet note
That was meant from the nightingales to float :
Now I whisper it, whisper it dumb in your throat.

When will you love me no more, no more,
And my happy, happy dream be o'er ?
When no rose is red, and no skies are blue,
And no nightingale sings the whole year through,
Then my heart may have no love for you.

XII.

My Love o'er the water bends dreaming ;
It glideth and glideth away :

She sees there her own beauty, gleaming
Through shadow and ripple and spray.

Oh, tell her, thou murmuring river,
As past her your light wavelets roll,
How steadfast that image for ever
Shines pure in pure depths of my soul.

XIII.

The wandering airs float over the lawn,
And linger and whisper in at our bower ;
(They babble, babble all they know :)
The delicate secrets they have drawn
From bird and meadow and tree and flower ;
(Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

Some linden stretches itself to the height,
Then rustles back to its dream of the day ;
(They babble, babble all they know :)
Some bird would trill out its love-delight,
But the honey melts in its throat away ;
(Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

Some flower seduced by the treacherous calm
Breathes all its soul in a fragrant sigh ;
(They babble, babble all they know :)

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Some blossom weeps a tear of balm
For the lost caress of a butterfly ;
 (Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

Our Mother lies in siesta now,
And we listen to her breathings here ;
 (They babble, babble all they know :)
And we learn all the thoughts hid under her brow,
All her heart's deep dreams of the happy year :
 (Gossiping softly, whispering low.)

XIV.

Those azure, azure eyes
 Gaze on me with their love ;
And I am lost in dream,
 And cannot speak or move.

Those azure, azure eyes
 Stay with me when we part ;
A sea of azure thoughts
 Overfloods my heart.*

* " Mit deinen blauen Augen
 Siehst du mich lieblich an ;
Da ward mir so träumend zu Sinne
 Dass ich nicht sprechen kann.

" An deine blauen Augen
 Gedenk' ich allerwärts ;—
Ein Meer von blauen Gedanken
 Ergiesst sich über mein Herz."—*Heine.*

XV.

Give a man a horse he can ride,
Give a man a boat he can sail ;
And his rank and wealth, his strength and health,
On sea nor shore shall fail.

Give a man a pipe he can smoke,
Give a man a book he can read ;
And his home is bright with a calm delight,
Though the room be poor indeed.

Give a man a girl he can love,
As I, O my Love, love thee ;
And his heart is great with the pulse of Fate,
At home, on land, on sea.

XVI.

My love is the flaming Sword
To fight through the world ;
Thy love is the Shield to ward,
And the Armour of the Lord
And the Banner of Heaven unfurled.

XVII.

Let my voice ring out and over the earth,
Through all the grief and strife,
With a golden joy in a silver mirth :
Thank God for Life !

Let my voice swell out through the great abyss
 To the azure dome above,
 With a chord of faith in the harp of bliss :
 Thank God for Love !

Let my voice thrill out beneath and above,
 The whole world through :
 O my Love and Life, O my Life and Love,
 Thank God for you !

XVIII.

The wine of Love is music,
 And the feast of Love is song :
 And when Love sits down to the banquet,
 Love sits long :

Sits long and ariseth drunken,
 But not with the feast and the wine ;
 He reeleth with his own heart,
 That great rich Vine.

XIX.

Drink ! drink ! open your mouth !
 This air is as rich as wine ;
 Flowing with balm from the sunny south,
 And health from the western brine.

Drink ! drink ! open your mouth !
This air is as strong as wine :
My brain is drugged with the balm o' the south,
And rolls with the western brine.

Drink ! drink ! open your mouth !
This air is the choicest wine ;
From that golden grape the Sun, i' the south
Of Heaven's broad vine.

xx.

Could we float thus ever,
Floating down a river,
Down a tranquil river, and you alone with me :
Past broad shining meadows,
Past the great wood-shadows,
Past fair farms and hamlets, for ever to the sea.

Through the golden noonlight,
Through the silver moonlight,
Through the tender gloaming, gliding calm and free ;
From the sunset gliding,
Into morning sliding,
With the tranquil river for ever to the sea.

Past the masses hoary
 Of cities great in story,
 Past their towers and temples drifting lone and free :
 Gliding, never hasting,
 Gliding, never resting,
 Ever with the river that glideth to the sea.

With a swifter motion
 Out upon the Ocean,
 Heaven above and round us, and you alone with me ;
 Heaven around and o'er us,
 The Infinite before us,
 Floating on for ever upon the flowing sea.

What time is it, dear, now ?
 We are in the year now
 Of the New Creation one million two or three.
 But where are we now, Love ?
 We are as I trow, Love,
 In the Heaven of Heavens upon the Crystal Sea.

And may mortal sinners
 Care for carnal dinners
 In your Heaven of Heavens, New Era millions three?
 Oh, if their boat gets stranding
 Upon some Richmond landing,
 They're thirsty as the desert and hungry as the sea !

SUNDAY AT HAMPSTEAD

(AN IDLE IDYLL BY A VERY HUMBLE MEMBER OF THE
GREAT AND NOBLE LONDON MOB.)

I.

THIS is the Heath of Hampstead,
There is the dome of Saint Paul's ;
Beneath, on the serried house-tops,
A chequered lustre falls :

And the mighty city of London,
Under the clouds and the light,
Seems a low wet beach, half shingle,
With a few sharp rocks upright.

Here will we sit, my darling,
And dream an hour away :
The donkeys are hurried and worried,
But we are not donkeys to-day :

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Through all the weary week, dear,
We toil in the murk down there,
Tied to a desk and a counter,
A patient stupid pair !

But on Sunday we slip our tether,
And away from the smoke and the smirch ;
Too grateful to God for His Sabbath
To shut its hours in a church.

Away to the green, green country,
Under the open sky ;
Where the earth's sweet breath is incense
And the lark sings psalms on high.

On Sunday we're Lord and Lady,
With ten times the love and glee
Of those pale and languid rich ones
Who are always and never free.

They drawl and stare and simper,
So fine and cold and staid,
Like exquisite waxwork figures
That must be kept in the shade :

We can laugh out loud when merry,
We can romp at kiss-in-the-ring,
We can take our beer at a public,
We can loll on the grass and sing. . . .

Would you grieve very much, my darling,
 If all yon low wet shore
 Were drowned by a mighty flood-tide,
 And we never toiled there more ?

Wicked ?—there is no sin, dear,
 In an idle dreamer's head ;
 He turns the world topsy-turvy
 To prove that his soul's not dead.

I am sinking, sinking, sinking ;
 It is hard to sit upright !
 Your lap is the softest pillow !
 Good night, my Love, good night !

II.

How your eyes dazzle down into my soul !
 I drink and drink of their deep violet wine,
 And ever thirst the more, although my whole
 Dazed being whirls in drunkenness divine.

Pout down your lips from that bewildering sm
 And kiss me for the interruption, Sweet !
 I had escaped you : floating for awhile
 In that far cloud ablaze with living heat :

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I floated with it through the solemn skies,
I melted with it up the Crystal Sea
Into the Heaven of Heavens ; and shut my eyes
To feel eternal rest enfolding me. . . .

Well, I prefer one tyrannous girl down here,
You jealous violet-eyed Bewitcher, you !
To being lord in Mohammed's seventh sphere
Of meekest hours threescore ten and two !

III.

Was it hundreds of years ago, my Love,
Was it thousands of miles away,
That two poor creatures we know, my Love,
Were toiling day by day ;
 Were toiling weary, weary,
 With many myriads more,
 In a City dark and dreary
 On a sullen river's shore ?

Was it truly a fact or a dream, my Love ?
I think my brain still reels,
And my ears still throbbing seem, my Love,
With the rush and the clang of wheels ;
 Of a vast machinery roaring
 For ever in skyless gloom ;
 Where the poor slaves peace imploring,
 Found peace alone in the tomb.

Was it hundreds of years ago, my Love,
 Was it thousands of miles away?
 Or was it a dream to show, my Love,
 The rapture of to-day?
 This day of holy splendour,
 This Sabbath of rich rest,
 Wherein to God we render
 All praise by being blest.

IV.

Eight of us promised to meet here
 And tea together at five :
 And—who would ever believe it?—
 We are the first to arrive !

Oh, shame on us, my darling ;
 It is a monstrous crime
 To make a tryst with *others*
 And be before our time !

Lizzie is off with William,
 Quite happy for her part ;
 Our sugar in her pocket,
 And the sweet love in her heart.

Mary and Dick so grandly
 Parade suburban streets ;
 His waistcoat and her bonnet
 Proving the best of treats.

And Fanny plagues big Robert
With tricks of the wildest glee :
O Fanny, *you'll* get in hot water
If you do not bring us our tea !

Why, bless me, look at that table,
Every one of them there !—
“ Ha, here at last we have them,
The always behindhand pair !

“ When the last trumpet-solo
Strikes up instead of the lark,
They'll turn in their sleep just grunting
Who's up so soon in the dark ?”

Babble and gabble, you rabble,
A thousand in full yell !
And this is your Tower of Babel,
This not-to-be-finished Hotel.*

“ You should see it in the drawing,
You'd think a Palace they make,
Like the one in the *Lady of Lyons*,
With this pond for the lovely lake !”

* (Since finished, in a fashion. The verses were written in 1863.)

"I wish it wasn't Sunday,
 There's no amusement at all :
 Who was here Hot-cross-bun-day ?
 We had such an open-air ball !

The bands played polkas, waltzes,
 Quadrilles ; it was glorious fun !
 And each gentleman gave them a penny
 After each dance was done."

"Mary is going to chapel,
 And what takes her there, do you guess ?
 Her sweet little duck of a bonnet,
 And her new second-hand silk dress."

"We went to Church one Sunday,
 But felt we had no right there ;
 For it's only a place for the grand folk
 Who come in a carriage and pair.

"And I laughed out loud,—it was shameful !
 But Fanny said, *Oh, what lives !*
He must have been clever, the rascal,
To manage seven hundred wives !"

"Suppose we play Hunt-the-Slipper ?"
 "We can't, there's the crinoline !"—"Phew !
 Bother it, always a nuisance !"
 "Hoop-de-dooden-do !"

"I think I've seen all the girls here,
About a thousand, or more ;
But none of them half so pretty
As our own loving four."

"*Thank* you ! and I've been listening
To lots of the men, the knaves ;
But none of them half such humbugs
As our devoted slaves."

"Do you see those purple flushes ?
The sun will set in state :
Up all ! we must cross to the heath, friends,
Before it gets too late.

"We will couch in the fern together,
And watch for the moon and the stars ;
And the slim tree-tops will be lighted,
So the boys may light their cigars.

"And while the sunset glory
Burns down in crimson and gold,
LAZY shall tell us a story
Of his wonderful times of old."

V.

Ten thousand years ago, ("*No more than that?*")
 Ten thousand years, ("*The age of Robert's hat!*"—
 "*Silence, you gods!*"—"Pinch Fanny!"—"Now
we're good.")

This place where we are sitting was a wood,
 Savage and desert save for one rude home
 Of wattles plastered with stiff clay and loam;
 And here, in front, upon the grassy mire
 Four naked squaws were squatted round a fire:
 Then four tall naked wild men crushing through
 The tangled underwood came into view;
 Two of them bent beneath a mighty boar,
 The third was gashed and bleeding, number four
 Strutted full-drest in war-paint, ("*That was Dick!*")
 Blue of a devilish pattern laid on thick.
 The squaws jumped up to roast the carcass whole;
 The braves sank silent, stark 'gainst root and bole.
 The meat half-done, they tore it and devoured,
 Sullenly ravenous; the women cowered
 Until their lords had finished, then partook.
 Mist rose; all crept into their cabin-nook,
 And staked the mouth; the floor was one broad bed
 Of rushes dried with fox and bearskins spread.
 Wolves howled and wild cats wailed; they snored;
 and so
 The long night passed, shedding a storm of snow;
 This very night ten thousand years ago.

VI.

Ten thousand years before, (*"Come, draw it mild!
Don't waste Conk-ology like that, my child!"*)

From where we sit to the horizon's bound
A level brilliant plain was spread all round,
As level and as brilliant as a sea
Under the burning sun ; high as your knee
Aflame with flowers, yellow and blue and red :
Long lines of palm-trees marked out there the bed
Of a great river, and among them gleamed
A few grey tents. Then four swift horsemen streamed
Out of the West, magnificent in ire,
Churning the meadow into flakes of fire,
Brandishing monstrous spears as if in fight,
They wheeled, ducked, charged, and shouted fierce
delight :

So till they reach the camp : the women there
Awaiting them the evening meal prepare ;
Milk from the goats and camels, dates plucked fresh,
Cool curds and cheese, millet, sweet broiled kid's flesh.
The spear struck deep hath picketed each barb ;
A grave proud turbaned man in flowing garb
Sups with a grave meek woman, humbly proud,
Whose eyes flash empire. Then the solemn crowd
Of stars above, the silent plain below,
Until the East resumes its furnace-glow ;
This same night twenty thousand years ago.

VII.

Ten thousand years before, (*"But if you take
 Such mouthfuls, you will soon eat up Time's cake!"*)
 Where we are sitting rose in splendid light
 A broad cool marble palace ; from the height
 Broad terrace-gardens stairlike sank away
 Down to the floor of a deep sapphire bay.
 Where the last slope slid greenly to the wave,
 And dark rich glossy foliage shadow gave,
 Four women—or four goddesses—leaned calm,
 Of mighty stature, graceful as the palm :
 One stroked with careless hand a lion's mane,
 One fed an eagle ; while a measured strain
 Was poured forth by the others, harp and voice,
 Music to make the universe rejoice.
 An isle was in the offing seen afar,
 Deep-purple based, its peak a glittering star ;
 Whence rowed a galley (drooped the silken
 sails),
 A dragon-barque with golden burning scales.
 Then four bronzed giants leapt to land, embraced
 The glorious women, chanting : "Did we haste ?
 The Cavern-Voice hath silenced all your fears ;
 Peace on our earth another thousand years !"

On fruits and noble wine, with song's rich flow,
 They feasted in the sunset's golden glow ;
 This same night thirty thousand years ago.

VIII.

Ten thousand years before, (*"Another ten !
Good Lord, how greedy are these little men !"*)
This place where we are sitting (*"Half asleep."*)
Was in the sea a hundred fathoms deep :
A floor of silver sand so fine and soft,
A coral forest branching far aloft ;
Above, the great dusk emerald golden-green ;
Silence profound and solitude serene.
Four mermaids sit beneath the coral rocks,
Combing with golden combs their long green
 locks,
And wreathing them with little pearly shells ;
Four mermen come from out the deep-sea dells,
And whisper to them, and they all turn pale :
Then through the hyaline a voice of wail,
With passionate gestures, "Ever alas for woe !
A rumour cometh down the Ocean-flow,
A word calamitous ! that we shall be
All disinherited from the great sea :
Our tail with which like fishes we can swim
Shall split into an awkward double-limb,
And we must waddle on the arid soil,
And build dirt-huts, and get our food with toil,
And lose our happy, happy lives !" And so
These gentle creatures wept "Alas for woe !"
This same night forty thousand years ago.

IX.

*"Are you not going back a little more ?
 What was the case ten thousand years before ?"*
 Ten thousand years before 'twas Sunday night ;
 Four lovely girls were listening with delight,
 Three noble youths admired another youth
 Discoursing History crammed full of truth :
 They all were sitting upon Hampstead Heath,
 And monstrous grimy London lay beneath.
 "The stupidest story LAZY ever told ;
 I've no more faith in his fine times of old."
 "How do you like our prospects now, my dears ?
 We'll all be mermaids in ten thousand years."
 "Mermaids are beautiful enough, but law !
 Think of becoming a poor naked squaw !"
 "But in these changes, sex will change no doubt ;
 We'll all be men and women turn about."
 "Then these four chaps will be the squaws ?—that's
 just ;
 With lots of picaninnies, I *do* trust !"
 "If changes go by fifty thousand, yes ;
 But if by ten, they last were squaws, I guess !"
 "Come on ; we'll go and do the very beers
 We did this night was fifty thousand years."
 Thou prophet, thou deep sage ! we'll go, we'll go :
 The ring is round, Life naught, the World an O ;
 This night is fifty thousand years ago !

X.

As we rush, as we rush in the Train,
 The trees and the houses go wheeling back,
 But the starry heavens above the plain
 Come flying on our track.

All the beautiful stars of the sky,
 The silver doves of the forest of Night,
 Over the dull earth swarm and fly,
 Companions of our flight.

We will rush ever on without fear ;
 Let the goal be far, the flight be fleet !
 For we carry the Heavens with us, Dear,
 While the Earth slips from our feet !

XI.

Day after day of this azure May
 The blood of the Spring has swelled in my veins ;
 Night after night of broad moonlight
 A mystical dream has dazzled my brains.

A seething might, a fierce delight,
 The blood of the Spring is the wine of the world ;
 My veins run fire and thrill desire,
 Every leaf of my heart's red rose uncurled.

A sad sweet calm, a tearful balm,
 The light of the Moon is the trance of the world ;

My brain is fraught with yearning thought,
And the rose is pale and its leaves are furled.

O speed the day, thou dear, dear May,
And hasten the night I charge thee, O June,
When the trance divine shall burn with the wine
And the red rose unfurl all its fire to the Moon!

XII.

O mellow moonlight warm,
Weave round my Love a charm ;
O countless starry eyes,
Watch from the holy skies ;
O ever-solemn Night,
Shield her within thy might :
 Watch her, my little one !
 Shield her, my darling !

How my heart shrinks with fear,
Nightly to leave thee, dear ;
Lonely and pure within
Vast glooms of woe and sin :
Our wealth of love and bliss
Too heavenly-perfect is :
 Good night, my little one !
 God keep thee, darling !

THE NAKED GODDESS

"Arcane danze
D'immortal piede i ruinosi gioghi
Scossero e l'ardue selve (oggi romito
Nido de' venti)."—LEOPARDI.

THROUGH the country to the town
Ran a rumour and renown,
That a woman grand and tall,
Swift of foot, and therewithal
Naked as a lily gleaming,
Had been seen by eyes not dreaming,
Darting down far forest glades,
Flashing sunshine through the shades.

With this rumour's swelling word
All the city buzzed and stirred ;
Solemn senators conferred ;
Priest, astrologer, and mage,
Subtle sophist, bard, and sage,
Brought their wisdom, lore, and wit,
To expound or riddle it :
Last a porter ventured—"We
Might go out ourselves to see."

Thus, upon a summer morn
Lo the city all forlorn ;
Every house and street and square
In the sunshine still and bare,
Every galley left to sway
Silent in the glittering bay ;
All the people swarming out,
Young and old a joyous rout,
Rich and poor, far-streaming through
Fields and meadows dark with dew,
Crowd on crowd, and throng on throng ;
Chatter, laughter, jest, and song
Deafened all the singing birds,
Wildered sober grazing herds.

Up the hillside 'gainst the sun,
Where the forest outskirts run ;
On along the level high,
Where the azure of the sky,
And the ruddy morning sheen,
Drop in fragments through the treen
Where the sward surrounds the brake
With a lucid, glassy lake,
Where the ample glades extend
Until clouds and foliage blend ;
Where whoever turneth may
See the city and the bay,

And, beyond, the broad sea bright,
League on league of slanting light ;
Where the moist blue shadows sleep
In the sacred forest deep.

Suddenly the foremost pause,
Ere the rear discern a cause ;
Loiterers press up row on row,
All the mass heaves to and fro ;
All seem murmuring in one strain,
All seem hearkening fixed and fain :
Silence, and the lifted light
Of countless faces gazing white.

Four broad beech-trees, great of bole,
Crowned the green, smooth-swelling knoll ;
There She leant, the glorious form
Dazzling with its beauty warm,
Naked as the sun of noon,
Naked as the midnight moon :
And around her, tame and mild,
All the forest creatures wild—
Lion, panther, kid, and fawn,
Eagle, hawk, and dove, all drawn
By the magic of her splendour,
By her great voice, rich and tender,
Whereof every beast and bird
Understood each tone and word,

While she fondled and carest,
Playing freaks of joyous zest.

Suddenly the lion stood,
Turned and saw the multitude,
Swelled his mighty front in ire,
Roared the roar of raging fire :
Then She turned, the living light,
Sprang erect, grew up in height,
Smote them with the flash and blaze
Of her terrible, swift gaze ;
A divine, flushed, throbbing form,
Dreadfuller than blackest storm.

All the forest creatures cowered,
Trembling, moaning, overpowered ;
All the simple folk who saw
Sank upon their knees in awe
Of this Goddess, fierce and splendid,
Whom they witless had offended ;
And they murmured out faint prayers,
Inarticulate despairs,
Till her hot and angry mien
Grew more gentle and serene.

Stood the high priest forth, and went
Halfway up the green ascent ;

There began a preachment long
Of the great and grievous wrong
She unto her own soul wrought
In thus living without thought
Of the gods who sain and save,
Of the life beyond the grave :
Living with the beasts that perish,
Far from all the rites that cherish
Hope and faith and holy love,
And appease the thrones above :
Full of unction pled the preacher ;
Let her come and they would teach her
Spirit strangled in the mesh
~~Of the vile and sinful flesh,~~
How to gain the heavenly prize,
How grow meet for Paradise ;
Penance, prayer, self sacrifice,
Fasting, cloistered solitude,
Mind uplifted, heart subdued ;
Thus a Virgin, clean and chaste,
In the Bridegroom's arms embraced.
Vestal sister's hooded gown,
Straight and strait, of dismal brown,
Here he proffered, and laid down
On the green grass like a frown.

Then stood forth the old arch-sage,
Wrinkled more with thought than age :

What could worse afflict, deject
Any well-trained intellect
Than in savage forest seeing
Such a full-grown human being
With the beasts and birds at play,
Ignorant and wild as they?
Sciences and arts, by which
Man makes Nature's poor life rich,
Dominates the world around,
Proves himself its King self-crowned,
She knew nothing of them, she
Knew not even what they be!
Body naked to the air,
And the reason just as bare!
Yet (since circumstance, that can
Hinder the full growth of man,
Cannot kill the seeds of worth
Innate in the Lord of Earth),
Yet she might be taught and brought
To full sovranity of thought,
Crowned with reason's glorious crown.
So he tendered and laid down,
Sober grey beside the brown,
Amplest philosophic gown.

Calm and proud she stood the while
With a certain wondering smile ;

When the luminous sage was done
She began to speak as one
Using language not her own,
Simplest words in sweetest tone :
"Poor old greybeards, worn and bent !
I do know not what they meant ;
Only here and there a word
Reached my mind of all I heard ;
Let some child come here, I may
Understand what it can say."

So two little children went,
Lingering up the green ascent,
Hand in hand, but grew the while
Bolder in her gentle smile ;
When she kissed them they were free,
Joyous as at mother's knee.
"Tell me, darlings, now," said she,
"What they want to say to me."
Boy and girl then, nothing loth,
Sometimes one and sometimes both,
Prattled to her sitting there
Fondling with their soft young hair :
"Dear kind lady, do you stay
Here with always holiday?
Do you sleep among the trees?
People want you, if you please,

To put on your dress and come
With us to the City home ;
Live with us and be our friend :
Oh, such pleasant times we'll spend ! . . .
But if you can't come away,
Will you let us stop and play
With you and all these happy things
With hair and horns and shining wings ? ”

She arose and went half down,
Took the vestal sister's gown,
Tried it on, burst through its shroud,
As the sun burns through a cloud :
Flung it from her split and rent ;
Said : “ This cerement sad was meant
For some creature stunted, thin,
Breastless, blighted, bones and skin.”

Then the sage's robe she tried,
Muffling in its long folds wide
All her lithe and glorious grace :
“ I should stumble every pace !
This big bag was meant to hold
Some poor sluggard fat and old,
Limping, shuffling wearily,
With a form not fit to see ! ”
So she flung it off again
With a gesture of disdain.

Naked as the midnight moon,
Naked as the sun of noon,
Burning too intensely bright,
Clothed in its own dazzling light ;
Seen less thus than in the shroud
Of morning mist or evening cloud ;
She stood terrible and proud
O'er the pallid quivering crowd.

At a gesture ere they wist,
Perched a falcon on her wrist,
And she whispered to the bird
Something it alone there heard ;
Then she threw it off : when thrown
Straight it rose as falls a stone,
Arrow-swift on high, on high,
Till a mere speck in the sky ;
Then it circled round and round,
Till, as if the prey were found,
Forth it darted on its quest
Straight away into the West. . . .
Every eye that watched its flight
Felt a sideward flash of light,
All were for a moment dazed,
Then around intently gazed :
What had passed them ? Where was She,
The offended deity ?

O'er the city, o'er the bay,
They beheld her melt away,
Melt away beyond their quest
Through the regions of the west ;
While the eagle screamed rauque ire,
And the lion roared like fire.

That same night both priest and sage
Died accursed in sombre rage.
Never more in wild wood green
Was that glorious Goddess seen,
Never more : and from that day
Evil hap and dull decay
Fell on countryside and town ;
Life and vigour dwindled down ;
Storms in Spring nipped bud and sprout,
Summer suns shed plague and drought,
Autumn's store was crude and scant,
Winter snows beleaguered want ;
Vines were black at vintage-tide,
Flocks and herds of murrain died ;
Fishing boats came empty home,
Good ships foundered in the foam ;
Haggard traders lost all heart
Wandering through the empty mart :
For the air hung thick with gloom,
Silence, and the sense of doom.

But those little children she
Had caressed so tenderly
Were betrothed that self-same night,
Grew up beautiful and bright,
Lovers through the years of play
Forward to their marriage-day.
Three long moons of bridal bliss
Overflowed them ; after this,
With his bride and with a band
Of the noblest in the land,
Youths and maidens, wedded pairs
Scarcely older in life's cares,
He took ship and sailed away
Westward Ho from out the bay :
Portioned from their native shrine
With the Sacred Fire divine,
They will cherish while they roam,
Quenchless 'mid the salt sea foam,
Till it burns beneath a dome
In some new and far-off home.

As they ventured more and more
In that ocean without shore,
And some hearts were growing cold
At the emprise all too bold,
It is said a falcon came
Down the void blue swift as flame ;

Every sunset came to rest
On the prow's high curving crest,
Every sunrise rose from rest
Flying forth into the west ;
And they followed, faint no more,
Through that ocean without shore.

Three moons crescent fill and wane
O'er the solitary main,
When behold a green shore smile :
It was that Atlantic isle,
Drowned beneath the waves and years,
Whereof some faint shadow peers
Dubious through the modern stream
Of Platonic legend-dream.
High upon that green shore stood
She who left their native wood ;
Glorious, and with solemn hand
Beckoned to them there to land.
Though She forthwith disappeared
As the wave-worn galley neared,
They knew well her presence still
Haunted stream and wood and hill.
There they landed, there grew great,
Founders of a mighty state :
There the Sacred Fire divine
Burned within a wondrous shrine

Which Her statue glorified
Throughout many kingdoms wide.
There those children wore the crown
To their children handed down
Many and many a golden age
Blotted now from history's page ;
Till the last of all the line
Leagued him with the other nine
Great Atlantic kings whose hosts
Ravaged all the Mid Sea coasts :
Then the whelming deluge rolled
Over all those regions old ;
Thrice three thousand years before
Solon questioned Egypt's lore.*

1866-7.

* Plato : the *Timæus*, and the *Critias*.

THE THREE THAT SHALL BE ONE

Love on the earth alit,
Come to be Lord of it ;
Looked round and laughed with glee,
Noble my empery !
Straight ere that laugh was done
Sprang forth the royal sun,
Pouring out golden shine
Over the realm divine.

Came then a lovely may,
Dazzling the new-born day,
Wreathing her golden hair
With the red roses there,
Laughing with sunny eyes
Up to the sunny skies,
Moving so light and free
To her own minstrelsy.

Love with swift rapture cried,
Dear Life, thou art my bride !
Whereto, with fearless pride,
Dear Love, indeed thy bride !
All the earth's fruit and flowers,
All the world's wealth are ours ;
Sun, moon, and stars gem
Our marriage diadem.

So they together fare,
Lovely and joyous pair ;
So hand in hand they roam
All through their Eden home ;
Each to the other's sight
An ever-new delight :
Blue heaven and blooming earth
Joy in their darling's mirth.

Who comes to meet them now,—
She with the pallid brow,
Wreathing her night-dark hair
With the red poppies there,
Pouring from solemn eyes
Gloom through the sunny skies,
Moving so silently
In her deep reverie ?

Life paled as she drew near,
 Love shook with doubt and fear.
 Ah, then, she said, in truth
 (Eyes full of yearning ruth),
 Love, thou would'st have this Life,
 Fair may! to be thy wife?
 Yet at an awful shrine
 Wert thou not plighted mine?

Pale, paler poor Life grew;
 Love murmured, It is true!
 How could I thee forsake?
 From the brief dream I wake.
 Yet, O belovèd Death,
 See how *she* suffereth;
 Ere we from earth depart
 Soothe her, thou tender heart!

Faint on the ground she lay;
 Love kissed the swoon away;
 Death then bent over her,
 Death the sweet comforter!
 Whispered with tearful smile,
 Wait but a little while,
 Then I will come for thee;
 We are one family.

A R T

I.

WHAT precious thing are you making fast
In all these silken lines?
And where and to whom will it go at last?
Such subtle knots and twines!

I am tying up all my love in this,
With all its hopes and fears,
With all its anguish and all its bliss,
And its hours as heavy as years.

I am going to send it afar, afar,
To I know not where above;
To that sphere beyond the highest star
Where dwells the soul of my Love.

But in vain, in vain, would I make it fast
With countless subtle twines;
For ever its fire breaks out at last,
And shrivels all the lines.

II.

If you have a carrier-dove
That can fly over land and sea ;
And a message for your Love,
 " Lady, I love but thee ! "

And this dove will never stir
But straight from her to you,
And straight from you to her ;
As you know and she knows too.

Will you first ensure, O sage,
Your dove that never tires
With your message in a cage,
 Though a cage of golden wires ?

Or will you fling your dove :
 *" Fly, darling, without rest,
Over land and sea to my Love,
And fold your wings in her breast " ?*

III.

Singing is sweet ; but be sure of this,
Lips only sing when they cannot kiss.

Did he ever suspire a tender lay
While her presence took his breath away ?

Had his fingers been able to toy with her hair
Would they then have written the verses fair?

Had she let his arm steal round her waist
Would the lovely portrait yet be traced?

Since he could not embrace it flushed and warm
He has carved in stone the perfect form.

Who gives the fine report of the feast?
He who got none and enjoyed it least.

Were the wine really slipping down his throat
Would his song of the wine advance a note?

Will you puff out the music that sways the whirl,
Or dance and make love with a pretty girl?

Who shall the great battle-story write?
Not the hero down in the thick of the fight.

Statues and pictures and verse may be grand,
But they are not the Life for which they stand.

PHILOSOPHY

I.

His eyes found nothing beautiful and bright,
Nor wealth nor honour, glory nor delight,
Which he could grasp and keep with might and
right.

Flowers bloomed for maidens, swords outflashed
for boys,
The world's big children had their various toys ;
He could not feel their sorrows and their joys.

Hills held a secret they would not unfold,
In careless scorn of him the ocean rolled,
The stars were alien splendours high and cold.

He felt himself a king bereft of crown,
Defrauded from his birthright of renown,
Bred up in littleness with churl and clown.

II.

How could he vindicate himself? His eyes,
That found not anywhere their proper prize,
Looked through and through the specious earth
and skies.

They probed, and all things yielded to their probe ;
They saw the void around the massy globe,
The raging fire within its flowery robe.

They pierced through beauty ; saw the bones, the
mesh
Of nerves and veins, the hideous raw red flesh,
Beneath the skin most delicate and fresh :

Saw Space a mist unfurled around the steep
Where plunge Time's waters to the blackest deep ;
Saw Life a dream in Death's eternal sleep.

III.

A certain fair form came before his sight,
Responding to him as the day to night :
To yearning, love ; to cold and gloom, warm light.

A hope sprang from his breast, and fluttered far
On rainbow wings ; beyond the cloudy bar,
Though very much beneath the nearest star.

His eyes drew back their beams to kindle fire
In his own heart ; whose masterful desire
Scorned all beyond its aim, lower or higher.

This fire flung lustre upon grace and bloom,
Gave warmth and brightness to a little room,
Burned Thought to ashes in its fight with gloom.

IV.

He said : Those eyes alone see well that view
Life's lovely surfaces of form and hue ;
And not Death's entrails, looking through and
through.

Bones, nerves, and veins, and flesh, are covered in
By this opaque transparency of skin,
Precisely that we should not see within.

The corpse is hid, that Death may work its vile
Corruption in black secrecy ; the while
Our saddest graves with grass and fair flowers smile.

If you will analyse the bread you eat,
The water and the wine most pure and sweet,
Your stomach soon must loathe all drink and meat.

Life liveth but in Life, and doth not roam
To other realms if all be well at home :
"Solid as ocean-foam," quoth ocean-foam.

If Midge will pine and curse its hours away
Because Midge is not Everything For-aye,
Poor Midge thus loses its one summer day ;
Loses its all—and winneth what, I pray ?

1866.

LIFE'S HEBE

IN the early morning-shine
Of a certain day divine,
I beheld a Maiden stand
With a pitcher in her hand ;
Whence she poured into a cup
Until it was half filled up
Nectar that was golden light
In the cup of crystal bright.

And the first who took the cup
With pure water filled it up ;
As he drank then, it was more
Ruddy golden than before :
And he leapt and danced and sang
As to Bacchic cymbals' clang.

But the next who took the cup
With the red wine filled it up ;
What he drank then was in hue
Of a heavy sombre blue :

First he reeled and then he crept,
Then lay faint but never slept.

And the next who took the cup
With the white milk filled it up ;
What he drank at first seemed blood,
Then turned thick and brown as mud :
And he moved away as slow
As a weary ox may go.

But the next who took the cup
With sweet honey filled it up ;
Nathless that which he did drink
Was thin fluid black as ink :
As he went he stumbled soon,
And lay still in deathlike swoon.

She the while without a word
Unto all the cup preferred ;
Blandly smiled and sweetly laughed
As each mingled his own draught.

And the next who took the cup
To the sunshine held it up,
Gave it back and did not taste ;
It was empty when replaced :
First he bowed a reverent bow,
Then he kissed her on the brow.

But the next who took the cup
Without mixture drank it up ;
When she took it back from him
It was full unto the brim :
He with a right bold embrace
Kissed her sweet lips face to face.

Then she sang with blithest cheer :
Who has thirst, come here, come here !
Nectar that is golden light
In the cup of crystal bright,
Nectar that is sunny fire
Warm as warmest heart's desire :
Pitcher never lacketh more,
Arm is never tired to pour :
Honey, water, milk, or wine
Mingle with the draught divine,
Drink it pure, or drink it not ;
Each is free to choose his lot :
Am I old ? or am I cold ?
Only two have kissed me bold !

She was young and fair and gay
As that young and glorious day.

A POLISH INSURGENT

WHAT would you have? said I ; *

'Tis so easy to go and die,

'Tis so hard to stay and live,

In this alien peace and this comfort callous,

Where only the murderers get the gallows,

Where the jails are for rogues who thieve.

'Tis so easy to go and die,

Where our Country, our Mother, the Martyr,

Moaning in bonds doth lie,

Bleeding with stabs in her breast,

Her throat with a foul clutch prest,

Under the thrice-accursed Tartar.

But Smith, your man of sense,

Ruddy, and broad, and round—like so !

Kindly—but dense, but dense,

Said to me : “ Do not go :

It is hopeless ; right is wrong ;

The tyrant is too strong.”

* Some time after writing this I found that the great BALZAC, in *La Cousine Bette*, dwells on this very phrase, “ Que voulez-vous ? ” as characteristic of the gallant and reckless Poles.

Must a man have *hope* to fight ?
Can a man not fight in despair ?
Must the soul cower down for the body's weakness,
And slaver the devil's hoof with meekness,
Nor care nor dare to share
Certain defeat with the right ?

They do not know us, my Mother !
They know not our love, our hate !
And how we would die with each other,
Embracing proud and elate,
Rather than live apart
In peace with shame in the heart.

No hope !—If a heavy anger
Our God hath treasured against us long,
His lightning-shafts from His thunder-clangour
Raining a century down :
We have loved when we went most wrong ;
He cannot for ever frown.

No hope !—We can haste to be killed,
That the tale of the victims get filled ;
The more of the debt we pay,
The less on our sons shall weigh :
This star through the baleful rack of the cope
Burns red ; red is our hope.

O our Mother, thou art noble and fair !
Fair and proud and chaste, thou Queen !
Chained and stabbed in the breast,
Thy throat with a foul clutch prest ;
Yet around thee how coarse, how mean,
Are these rich shopwives who stare !

Art thou moaning, O our Mother, through the swoon
Of thine agony of desolation ?—
“ Do my sons still love me ? or can they stand
Gazing afar from a foreign land,
Loving more peace and gold—the boon
Of a people strange, of a sordid nation ? ”

O our Mother, moan not thus !
We love you as you love us,
And our hearts are wild with thy sorrow :
If we cannot save thee, we are blest
Who can die on thy sacred bleeding breast.—
 So we left Smith-Land on the morrow,
 And we hasten across the West.

L'ANCIEN RÉGIME;

OR,

THE GOOD OLD RULE

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king,
Our king all kings above?
A young girl brought him love;
And he dowered her with shame,
With a sort of infamous fame,
And then with lonely years
Of penance and bitter tears:
Love is scarcely the thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A statesman brought him planned
Justice for all the land;

And he in recompense got
Fierce struggle with brigue and plot,
Then a fall from lofty place
Into exile and disgrace :
Justice is never the thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king ?
A writer brought him truth ;
And first he imprisoned the youth ;
And then he bestowed a free pyre
That the works might have plenty of fire,
And also to cure the pain
Of the headache called thought in the brain :
Truth is a very bad thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king ?
The people brought their sure
Loyalty fervid and pure ;
And he gave them bountiful spoil
Of taxes and hunger and toil,
Ignorance, brutish plight,
And wholesale slaughter in fight :
Loyalty's quite the worst thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A courtier brought to his feet
Servility graceful and sweet,
With an ever ready smile
And an ever supple guile ;
And he got in reward the place
Of the statesman in disgrace :
Servility's always a thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A soldier brought him war,
La gloire, la victoire,
Ravage and carnage and groans,
For the pious *Te Deum* tones ;
And he got in return for himself
Rank and honours and pelf :
War is a very fine thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king?
A harlot brought him her flesh,
Her lusts, and the manifold mesh
Of her wiles interwoven with caprice ;
And he gave her his realm to fleece,

To corrupt, to ruin, and gave
Himself for her toy and her slave :
Harlotry's just the thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king ?
Our king who fears to die ?
A priest brought him a lie,
The blackness of hell uprolled
In heaven's shining gold ;
And he got as guerdon for that
A see and a cardinal's hat :
A lie is an excellent thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Has any one yet a thing
For a gift to our lord the king ?
The country gave him a tomb,
A magnificent sleeping-room ;
And for this it obtained some rest,
Clear riddance of many a pest,
And a hope which it much enjoyed
That the throne would continue void :
A tomb is the very best thing
For a gift to our lord the king.

E. B. B.

THE white-rose garland at her feet,
The crown of laurel at her head,
Her noble life on earth complete,
Lay her in the last low bed
For the slumber calm and deep :
"He giveth His beloved sleep."

Soldiers find their fittest grave
In the field whereon they died ;
So her spirit pure and brave
Leaves the clay it glorified
To the land for which she fought
With such grand impassioned thought.

Keats and Shelley sleep at Rome,
She in well-loved Tuscan earth ;
Finding all their death's long home
Far from their old home of birth.
Italy, you hold in trust
Very sacred English dust.

Therefore this one prayer I breathe,—
That you yet may worthy prove
Of the heirlooms they bequeath
Who have loved you with such love :
Fairest land while land of slaves
Yields their free souls no fit graves.

POLYCRATES ON WATERLOO BRIDGE

LET no mortals dare to be
Happier in their lives than we :
Thus the jealous gods decree.

This decree was never heard,
Never by their lips averred,
Yet on high stands registered.

I have read it, and I fear
All the gods above, my Dear,
All must envy us two here.

Let us, then, propitiate
These proud satraps of sole Fate ;
Our hearts' wealth is all too great.

Say, what rich and cherished thing
Can I to the river fling
As a solemn offering ?

254 POLYCRATES ON WATERLOO BRIDGE

O belovèd Meerschäum Pipe,
Whose pink bloom would soon be ripe,
Must thou be the chosen type?

Cloud-compeller! Foam o' the Sea,
Whence rose Venus fair and free
On some poet's reverie!

In the sumptuous silken-lined
Case where thou hast lain enshrined
Thou must now a coffin find!

And, to drag thee surely down,
Lo! I tie my last half-crown:
We shall have to walk through town.

Penny toll is paid, and thus
All the bridge is free to us;
But no cab, nor even a 'bus!

Far I fling thee through the gloom;
Sink into thy watery tomb,
O thou consecrate to Doom!

May no sharp police, while they track
Spoils thrown after some great "crack,"
Ever, ever bring thee back!

No mudlarkers, who explore
Every ebb the filthy floor,
Bring thee to the day once more !

No sleek cook—I spare the wish ;
Dead dogs, cats, and suchlike fish,
Surely are not yet a dish ? . . .

Gods ! the dearest, as I wis,
Of my treasures offered is ;
Pardon us our heavenly bliss !

What Voice murmurs full of spleen ?
Not that Pipe, but——Ssss ! how mean
All the gods have ever been !

SHAMELESS

Kew Gardens.

THAT irreverent scoundrel grinned as he passed ;
And perhaps we *did* look silly !
As I on you those sheep's-eyes cast,
Which you cast back willy-nilly :

While both my hands patted your dear little hand,
As if in a fit of abstraction ;
And you let it lie at their command,
Quite unaware of the action !

A deaf mute, say, for the first time sees
A youth and a damsel dancing,
With their bows, twirls, shuffles, and one-two-threes,
Retreating and advancing.

He hears not the music, he finds no cause
For such bewildering antic ;
He thinks the poor creatures obey no laws,
But are certainly daft or frantic.

So one who has felt not the love which rules
And stirs, the harmonious passion,
Must deem us lovers demented fools
To act in so queer a fashion.

I have heard that this theme in the assonant rhyme
Has been sung with a beauty entrancing :
The Spaniards have ever been sublime
In passionate love and dancing.

1865.

THE FIRE THAT FILLED MY HEART OF OLD

I.

THE fire that filled my heart of old
Gave lustre while it burned ;
Now only ashes grey and cold
Are in its silence urned.
Ah ! better was the furious flame,
The splendour with the smart :
I never cared for the singer's fame,
But, oh ! for the singer's heart
Once more—
The burning fulgent heart !

II.

No love, no hate, no hope, no fear,
No anguish and no mirth ;
Thus life extends from year to year,
A flat of sullen dearth.

Ah ! life's blood creepeth cold and tame,
Life's thought plays no new part :
I never cared for the singer's fame,
But, oh ! for the singer's heart
Once more—
The bleeding passionate heart !

1864.

TWO SONNETS

I.

"WHY are your songs all wild and bitter sad
As funeral dirges with the orphans' cries?
Each night since first the world was made hath
had

A sequent day to laugh it down the skies.
Chant us a glee to make our hearts rejoice,
Or seal in silence this unmanly moan."
My friend, I have no power to rule my voice :
A spirit lifts me where I lie alone,
And thrills me into song by its own laws ;
That which I feel, but seldom know, indeed
Tempering the melody it could not cause.
The bleeding heart cannot for ever bleed
Inwardly solely : on the wan lips too
Dark blood will bubble ghastly into view.

II.

Striving to sing glad songs, I but attain
Wild discords sadder than Grief's saddest tune ;
As if an owl with his harsh screech should strain
To over-gratulate a thrush of June.
The nightingale upon its thorny spray
Finds inspiration in the sullen dark ;
The kindling dawn, the world-wide joyous day
Are inspiration to the soaring lark ;
The seas are silent in the sunny calm,
Their anthem-surges in the tempest boom ;
The skies outroll no solemn thunder psalm
Till they have clothed themselves with clouds of
gloom.
My mirth can laugh and talk, but cannot sing ;
My grief finds harmonies in everything.

A SONG OF SIGHING

I.

WOULD some little joy to-day
Visit us, heart !
Could it but a moment stay,
Then depart,
With the flutter of its wings
Stirring sense of brighter things.

II.

Like a butterfly astray
In a dark room ;
Telling :—Outside there is day,
Sweet flowers bloom,
Birds are singing, trees are green,
Runnels ripple silver sheen.

III.

Heart ! we now have been so long
Sad without change,
Shut in deep from shine and song,
Nor can range ;
It would do us good to know
That the world is not all woe.

IV.

Would some little joy to-day
Visit us, heart !
Could it but a moment stay,
Then depart,
With the lustre of its wings
Lighting dreams of happy things,
O sad my heart !

DAY

WAKING one morning
In a pleasant land,
By a river flowing
Over golden sand :—

Whence flow ye, waters,
O'er your golden sand ?
We come flowing
From the Silent Land.

Whither flow ye, waters,
O'er your golden sand ?
We go flowing
To the Silent Land.

And what is this fair realm ?
A grain of golden sand
In the great darkness
Of the Silent Land.

NIGHT

HE cried out through the night :

“ Where is the light ?

Shall nevermore

Open Heaven's door ?

Oh, I am left

Lonely, bereft ! ”

He cried out through the night :

It spread vaguely white,

With its ghost of a moon

Above the dark swoon

Of the earth lying chill,

Breathless, grave still.

He cried out through the night :

His voice in its might

Rang forth far and far,

And then like a star

Dwindled from sense

In the Immense.

He cried out through the night :
No answering light,
No syllabled sound ;
Beneath and around
A long shuddering thrill,
Then all again still.

VIRTUE AND VICE

SHE was so good, and he was so bad :
A very pretty time they had !
A pretty time, and it lasted long :
Which of the two was more in the wrong ?
He befouled in the slough of sin ;
Or she whose piety pushed him in ?
He found her yet more cold and staid
As wedded wife than courted maid :
She filled their home with freezing gloom ;
He felt it dismal as a tomb :
Her steadfast mind disdained his toys
Of worldly pleasures, carnal joys ;
Her heart firm-set on things above
Was frigid to his earthly love.

So he came staggering home at night ;
Where she sat chilling, chaste, and white :
She smiled a scornful virtuous smile,
He flung good books with curses vile.
Fresh with the early morn she rose,
While he yet lay in a feverish doze :

She prayed for blessings from the Throne,
He called for "a hair of the dog" with a groan :
She blessed God for her strength to bear
The heavy load,—he 'gan to swear :
She sighed, Would Heaven, ere yet too late,
Bring him to see his awful state !
The charity thus sweetly pressed
Made him rage like one possessed.

So she grew holier day by day,
While he grew all the other way.
She left him : she had done her part
To wean from sin his sinful heart,
But all in vain ; her presence might
Make him a murderer some mad night.
Her family took her back, pure saint,
Serene in soul, above complaint :
The narrow path she strictly trod,
And went in triumph home to God :
While he into the Union fell,
Our halfway house on the road to Hell.
With which would you rather pass your life
The wicked husband or saintly wife ?

LOW LIFE

AS OVERHEARD IN THE TRAIN.

THAT jolly old gentleman, bless his white hat !
Wouldn't come in to spoil our chat ;
We are alone and we can speak,—
What have you done, Miss, all the week ?

“ Oh, all the day it's been fit and shew,
And all the night it's been trim and sew,
For the ladies are flocking to Exeter Hall
In lovely light dresses fit for a ball.”

Under your eye a little dark streak,
And a point of red on the top of your cheek,
And your temples quite dim against your hair ;
This sha'n't last very much longer I swear.

And what is the news from the workroom now ?
“ The week began with a bit of a row ;
Emmy Harley married young Earl
Just in the busy time ! ”—sensible girl !

" That was on Monday ; Missis said
It was very ungrateful, very ill-bred,
And very unkind to us when she knew
The work so heavy, the hands so few.

" But this was nothing : the minute we woke
On Wednesday, before it seemed any one spoke,
We knew that poor Mary Challis was dead ;
Kate Long had been sleeping in the same bed.

" Mary worked with us till twelve, when tea
Was brought in to keep us awake, but she
Was so ill then, Miss Cooper sent her to bed ;
And there in the morning they found her dead ;

" With Kate fast asleep by her side : they had come
To see how she was, and the sight struck them dumb :
At last they roused Kate and led her away ;
She was sick and shuddering all the day.

" Kate says when she went up at four to their room
She was stupid with sleep ; but she marked a faint
 bloom
On Mary's pale face, and she heard her breathe low—
A light fluttering breath now quick and now slow ;

" And feared to disturb her, for *she* had a cough,
But the moment she laid her head down she was off,

And knew nothing more till they stood by the side
Of the bed : p'raps Mary slept on till she died.

"They buried her yesterday. Kate was there,
And she was the only one Missis could spare ;
Some dresses were bound to be finished by night,
For the ladies to go in to Church all right.

"Poor Mary ! she didn't fear dying, she said,
Her father drinks and her mother is dead ;
But she hoped that in Heaven the white garments
wear
For ever ; no fashions and dressmaking There."

My Love, if the ladies most pious of all
Who flock to the Church and to Exeter Hall
Find Heaven has but one dress for rich as for poor,
And no fashions, they'll very soon cut it I'm sure.

I saw you ten minutes on Tuesday night,
Then I took the 'bus home for I had to write ;
And I wrote and I wrote like an engine till five,
When my fingers were dead and the letters alive.

A fair bill of costs from a deuce of a draft
In our Cashier's worst scrawl like Chinese ran daft ;
With entries between, on the margin, the back,
And figures like short-hand marks put to the rack.

But our Common-law Clerk is going away,
And the Gov'nor had me in yesterday,
And said he would try me, he thought I might do ;
And I jumped at the chance, for this child thinks
so too.

Just fancy, each morning a jolly good walk,
And instead of the copying, bustle and talk !
And if I do well—and well I will do—
A couple of sovs. a week for my screw !

And then when I'm free of the desk and the stool,
Do you think you will keep to the nunnery rule
Of the shop, till you go off like Mary some night
Smothered in work from the air and the light ?

We'll use our professional talents, my dear :
You shall make such a wedding dress, best of the
year !
And a wonderful marriage-deed I will draw
With magnificent settlements perfect in law.

Thus doing our duties in those states of life
In which it has pleased God to call us, *my wife* !
“ And how much a year will you settle on me ? ”
My body and soul and—what we shall see.

PROLOGUE

TO THE

PILGRIMAGE TO SAINT NICOTINE OF THE HOLY HERB

IN every country and in every age
Have men been wont to go on pilgrimage,
As I have read,—each visiting that shrine
Which seems to him most blessed and divine ;
Athwart far lands, athwart the wild sea foam :
Some to Jerusalem, and some to Rome ;
And some to Lourdes,—*très lourdes, très lourdes*
God wot,
Les pauvres âmes which seek *that* sacred spot ;
And some to Santiago far in Spain,
Anear the roar of the Atlantic main ;
And some unto our Lady of Lorette,—
Full many votaries this Dame doth get :
The very Paynims bring their vows and prayers
To Mecca and to Yeddo and Benares :

While others piously seek out the tombs
Of mighty men who have fulfilled their dooms,
The fields where battles long ago were fought,
The scenes wherever wondrous works were wrought,
The sites of antique cities overthrown,
The fanes of fair gods dead and turned to stone :—
What need write more ? when saint and bard and
sage

Declare our whole life but one Pilgrimage ;
A journey from the cradle to the bier
Of all the restless millions wandering here ;
A toilsome travel of all things alive
Unto the Temple where they all arrive,
And bowing down before the Shrine of Death
Find peace at last in breathing their last breath.

But furthermore thus teacheth the wise man ;
That age by age our human caravan
Is like unto all those that went before
And all that shall come after evermore :
New names, new robes, new thoughts and words
and deeds,
New toys and treasures, sciences and creeds
But ever the same passions and same needs :
The same old Drama on the same old Stage,
The same old tears and laughers, joy and rage ;
The selfsame characters upon the Scene,
Wise, foolish, rich and poor, and great and mean

Old actors fall away with weary hearts,
Fresh actors come to take the selfsame parts ;
And whosoe'er the destined rôles may fill,
Hamlet is Hamlet—Osric, Osric still ;
And ever with the fifth act come the knaves
To vent their clownish jests and dig the graves ;
And ever with the last scene entereth
Some princely one demanding—"O proud death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell ?
And so the Play is over : very well,
It shall be played again, and have a run,
Coëval with the earth's around the sun.

Lo this is what men call philosophie,
Whereof I know not anything perdie,
But it hath brought us to our proper theme,
Our CARD of beauty and of joy supreme,
Our peerless PILGRIMAGE unto the SHRINE
Of most beneficent SAINT NICOTINE.
Five hundred years ago DAN CHAUCER went
A-riding through the pleasant lanes of Kent,
In April on the eight and twentieth day,
Which were with us I ween a week in May,*

* There has been much learned astronomical discussion, of dubious import, about the exact time of the year, as indicated in the opening of the Prologue to the "Canterbury Tales." If the deep scientific gentlemen engaged had but condescended to

He and his compaignie of twenty-nine,
 Both men and women, to the holy shrine
 Of Him by hot Knights at the altar slain,
 And now by Master Froude killed over again
 All in cold blood ; alas ! a piteous doom,
 Sword-pierced in life and pen-pierced in the tomb :
 But Master Freeman now hath set to work
 To maul this Froude as if he were a Turk ;
 And he who kicked A'Becket as he lay
 Is like to kick the bucket in this fray.
 This compaignie it was of all degrees,
 The high, the low, the midway ; and all these,
 Yea, each and all, our POET doth rehearse
 And picture lifelike in his cordial verse ;

look forward to the Man of Law's Prologue they might have read in the beginning thereof—

" And though he [the host] were not depe expert in lore,
 He wiste it was the eighte and twenty day
 Of April, that is messenger to May."

This may suffice to fix the date accurately enough for us who are not astronomers. The Old Style, I suppose, would then be about eight days behind the New, as the difference I believe increases three days in every four centuries (one in each of the three which is not a multiple of four), and was eleven days in 1752, when the New Style was adopted in England (we all know how the populace vociferously demanded the eleven days of which they conceived themselves defrauded) : the Russians, who keep to the Old Style, now date twelve days behind us. Thus Chaucer's April 28 would be our May 6. In reading Herrick and his contemporaries on the delights of going a-Maying, we are apt to forget that their May-day the 1st was our 11th ; so with many old weather proverbs.

As sweet and rath as his own daisy was
"Upon the smalè, softè, swotè gras,"
As rich and free and cheerful as the gush
Of gratulation from a mid-June thrush :
I rede you read him once and twice and thrice,
And over again ; it is my boon advice ;
And learn what all these men and women were
In mind and body, state and garb and air ;
And feel what full red-blooded life did flow
Thorough their veins five hundred years ago ;
And find what Tales they told upon their way
Of noble tragedy and jolly play ;
And see that we are now what they were then,
Since fashions change, not women, neither men.

What this first Poet, whom we love so well,
Of merrie England, in his verse did tell
Of these glad Pilgrims, both their mind and
make,
That Artist of the Visions clepèd BLAKE,
Who also sang delightful young-world songs,
Soaring aloof from all our old-world wrongs,
Did picture forth with pencil and engrave,
Form after form to match the POET brave :
We touch not him, for he was grand and wild ;
We leave this giant who became a child.
A graceful limner, STOTHARD was his name,
Did set himself to enterprise the same,

And him we follow in our noble CARD ;
But whereas he went backward to the BARD
Through all the centuries, to match his rhyme,
We choose our Pilgrims from our very time :
For why? our SAINT is not the Saint of old,
But hath more votaries a hundredfold ;
Lo you shall hear of him anon, but first
Behoves the jolly Pilgrims be rehearsed ;
New Saint, New Pilgrims, but the counterparts
Of CHAUCER'S rout *en route* in brains and hearts.

VERSICLES

WHEREVER on this round earth
Your shaft shall enter,
Strike it straight, and never fear
But you'll reach at last the centre.

EACH doth by his birth belong
To some sphere wherein he's strong ;
Nine of ten with passion seek
Alien spheres wherein they're weak ;
Whence in almost every man
Such incongruous *Will* and *Can*.

DEAR Mother Earth, tell us, tell us, tell us !
What is the meaning of all the things we see?—
Oh ! what a family of puny little fellows,
Calling me always, *Tellus, Tellus, Tellus !*
Eat your bread, drink your wine, snatch at all you
see ;
But I am very busy, do not bother me.

November 1866.

L'ENVOY *

WHEN the sixties are outrun,
And the seventies nearly done,
Or the eighties just begun ;
May some young and happy man,
Wiser, kinder, nobler than
He who tenders this one, bring
You the real Magic Ring.

This one may have pleasant powers ;
Charming idle girlish hours
With its tales from færie bowers ;
Tinting hopeful maiden dreams
With its soft romantic gleams ;
Breathing love of love and truth,
Valour, innocence and ruth.

* [Written on the fly-leaf of *La Motte Fouqué's* "Magic Ring," given at Christmas time by Thomson to Mr. Bradlaugh's daughter Hypatia, then ten years old.]

But may that one bless the life
Of the woman and the wife
Through our dull world's care and strife ;
Year by year with rich increase,
Give you love, and joy, and peace ;
And at last the good death bring,
Sweet as sleep : your Magic Ring.

SUNDAY { LILAH,*
ALICE,
HYPATIA, } 14/2/69.

WHO was Lilah? I am sure
She was young and sweet and pure;
With the forehead wise men love,—
Here a lucid dawn above
Broad curved brows, and twilight there,
Under the deep dusk of hair.

And her eyes? I cannot say
Whether brown, or blue, or grey:
I have seen them brown, and blue,
And a soft green grey—the hue
Shakespeare loved (and he was wise),
“Grey as glass” were Silvia’s eyes.

[* Thomson bought at a second-hand bookstall a copy of *La Motte Fouquet's* “Undine,” with the name “Lilah” already inscribed in the middle of the front page. With this he bracketed the two other names, and, adding these charming lines, gave the book to the little girls, “Alice” and “Hypatia.”]

So to Lilah's name above
I will add two names I love,
Linking with the bracket curls
Three sweet names of three sweet girls,
Sunday of Saint Valentine,
Eighteen hundred sixty nine.

CREEDS AND MEN

Two hosts received me in one day,
And poured their best to greet my stay ;
The bottles, labels, seals were twins
Alike as penalties and sins :
Yet one flowed forth the richest wine ;
The other acid, gall, and brine.

Two hosts received me the next day,
And poured their best to greet my stay ;
The bottles, labels, seals in sooth
Unlike as falsehood unto truth :
Yet both flowed forth a liberal wine
Of festal jubulance divine.

Seals, labels, bottles are but vain ;
Regard the spirit they contain.

.
A poor gin-bottle I found one day,
Full of the wine of rich Tokay ;
A Tokay-bottle I found, within
Only the vilest vitriol gin :
No more of the outward form I ask,
But, what is the spirit that fills the flask ?

VERSIFICATION OF
THOMAS COOPER'S ARGUMENT

IN A DEBATE ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD
BETWEEN THAT GENTLEMAN AND
CHARLES BRADLAUGH

My poor friends, I come to you kindly,
With a brotherly kiss, not a rod ;
For I know that sincerely, though blindly,
You look up in vain for a God.
For a very long time I have sought you—
Since we met last the years are now seven—
And here I have found you and brought you
My Ladder for climbing to Heaven.

My wonderful Ladder, that reaches
From Self here to God (be not vex) ;
Though its rungs are so few, and though each is
A quite simple step from the next.
For five years and eight months precisely
It has borne me to either extreme,
As cleverly, safely, and nicely
As those angels of Jacob's sweet dream.

You have seen a lamp-lighter at work, friends?
 Well, just in his fashion I'll stop,
 Set my Ladder, mount quick, give a jerk, friends,
 And light up a God at the top.
 And Bradlaugh, this ignorant fellow,
 May pelt at my lamp as he likes
 (Young fools often do so when mellow);
 I wager no stone of his strikes.

I plant it on *I*; you can never
 Persuade me *I* am not, now, here :
 But as I have not been for ever,
 I must have a Cause—that is clear.
 And as *I* am a personal being,
 Intelligent, conscious, I claim
 That the stupidest cannot help seeing
 My Cause must be ditto—the same.

Take another neat step : there is nowhere
 Where Nothing at all can be found ;
 Wherever our thoughts go, they go where
 Unlimited Something's around :
 And the Cause of this infinite Something
 Must be certainly infinite too ;
 For it would be a monstrous and rum thing
 To fancy a finite would do.

So ourselves and the whole world of Matter
 Have *one* Cause—for who would explore
 (Without he was mad as a hatter)
 Still backwards forever for more?
 One cause, without cause, thus eternal;
 And infinite, therefore the power
 Of His will uncontrolled is supernal—
 Omnipotence must be His dower.

And this all-wise, all-good, and almighty
 Creator of spirit and clod,
 At the top of my Ladder of light, He
 It is whom we worship as God.
 O my friends, is the climbing not easy?
 And are not the steps safe and strong?
 And how should my Ladder not please ye
 When I've trusted to it so long?

O my luminous, logical Ladder,
 My natural musical scale,
 Whose notes swell up gladder and gladder
 In glory and triumph—all hail!
 The Cross, though a very good notion,
 And on the whole rather divine,
 Inspires no such fervid devotion
 As doth this grand Ladder of mine.

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P.S. penn'd for such as Truelove there
And Bradlaugh : My God in the sky
Is the little round dot up above there
Perfecting this neat little *i* :
For *i* wants the dot for completion,
But no dot is wanted by *u* :—
O Plato, much lecturing Grecian,
The Metempsychosis is true !

1864.

MR. MACCALL AT CLEVELAND HALL

(April 15, 1866)

MR. MACCALL at Cleveland Hall,
Sunday evening—date to fix—
Fifteenth April, sixty-six,
Speech reported and redacted
By a fellow much distracted.

I.

Who lectures? No mere scorner;
Clear-brained, his heart is warm.

She sits at the nearest corner
Of I will not say what form.

II.

The Conflict of Opinions
In the Present Day, saith Chair.

What muff in the British dominions
Could dispute that she is fair?

III.

Mammon-worship is horrid,
Plutocracy is base.

Dark hair from a fine small forehead ;
I catch but the still side face.

IV.

We wallow in mere dimension,
The Big to us is Great.

If she stood at her utmost tension
She *might* pass four feet eight.

V.

We lay on colour in splashes,
With a mop, or a broom for brush.

How dark are her long eyelashes !
How pure is her cheek's slight flush !

VI.

But we have no perception
For form—the divinest—now.

Each curve there is perfection,
In nostril, chin, and brow.

VII.

Our women are good kind creatures,
But they cannot dress at all.
Does her bonnet grace her features?—
Clear blue with a black lace fall.

VIII.

Low Church—very low—in the gutter ;
High Church—as ven'son high.
O'er the flower of her face gleams the flutter
Of a smile like a butterfly.

IX.

Herder, Wieland, Lessing ;
Bossuet, Montalembert.
Fine names, but the name worth guessing
Is the name of the sweet girl there.

X.

The individual ; true man ;
Individuality.
A man's but one half ; some woman
The other half must be.

XI.

Persistent valour the sternest,
With love's most gentle grace.

How grand is the eye fixed earnest
In the half-seen up-turned face !

XII.

" How did you like the lecture ?
Was it not beautiful ? "

I should think *she was* / " I conjecture
That your brains have been gathering wool ! "

P.S.

The Chairman was a rare man ;
At every telling point
He smiled at his post like a jolly host
Carving rich cuts from the joint ;
Which the name he bore was Richard Moore
Whom Heaven with grace anoint !

That conflict of opinion
It had its counterpart
In conflict for dominion
Between my head and heart.

April 16, 1866.

BILL JONES ON PRAYER

WELL, I'm not much of a hand at prayer,
It's hardly in my line ;
I am pretty fair at a laugh and a swear,
But a duffer at a whine.

And if so be that a God there be
On high above the sun,
Why, who can know so well as he,
What's the best thing to be done?

And since he is no less good than wise,
And has all power thereto,
Why should one pester him with cries
Of what he ought to do?

God helpeth him who helps himself,
They preach to us as a fact,
Which seems to lay up God on the shelf,
And leave the man to act.

Which seems to mean—You do the work,
Have all the trouble and pains,
While God, that Indolent Grand Old Turk,
Gets credit for the gains.

November 1, 1880.

EPIGRAMS

IPHIGENIA À LA MODE

How many a noble father since Agamemnon
 sinned,
Has sacrificed his daughter just to raise the
 wind !

1864.

LOVE'S LOGIC

Love's Logic :
I am and thou art must be marriage.
(A syllogism who will dare disparage.)

1865.

A TIMELY PRAYER

THOU great Physician, fair play is divine
To "M.D." add "V.S."; for, by the powers,
The cattle on a thousand hills are thine,
The cattle with a thousand ills are ours.*

1866.

WHO KILLED MOSES?

WHO killed poor Moses?
Goethe supposes
That the terrible son
Of a masculine Nun,
And Caleb his crony,
Whose sire is Jephone,
Together killed Moses;
So Goethe supposes!

1866.

* This was written at a time when the cattle-plague was very prevalent.

SUGGESTED FROM SOUTHAMPTON

MR. KINGSLEY'S faith is just
What a candidate should swear ;
Mr. Kingsley takes on trust
All these trifles light as Eyre.*

September 1866.

POOR INDEED !

THE earth is the lords' and the fulness thereof,
The country and also the towns ;
Our dear old Queen is our only sov.,
And she's hardly worth three crowns ;
And we very much fear when her loss we deplore,
The sovereign or crown we shall never see more.

April 1871.

* This refers to Mr. Kingsley's professed faith in the necessity of the severe measures taken by Governor Eyre in the suppression of the rebellion in Jamaica.

IN EXITU ISRAEL

THE Jew came up from the land of Goschen ;
Now Gladstone makes that land the ocean ;
A miracle which brings to thought
The plaguey wonders Moses wrought.

March 1871.

THE SUCCESSORS WHO DO NOT
SUCCEED

I.

THE first Apostles, called to be
Fishers of men in Galilee,
By hook or crook, as all agree,
 Did catch their men by shoal ;
Now each Successor has his see,
Fine gold and silver fish nets he,
Some jolly place, p'raps two or three,
 But never any soul.

II.

Could the Twelve see their faith's retrogression,
 The Bishops they would not bless,
"These rich rogues claim our succession,
 But the Infidels have our success."

April 1871.

BLESS THEE! THOU ART
TRANSLATED

DIZZY translated the Bishop *
For his Irish eloquence ;
But who can translate his sermons
Into English, and common sense ?

April 1871.

CROSS LINES FROM GOETHE

(Being No. 67 of the Epigrams dated Venice, 1790)

VERY much can I put up with. Most things that
are trials of temper
I in tranquillity bear, as if imposed by a God.
Some few, however, I find as hateful as poison
and serpents :
Four : the smoke of tobacco, garlic and bugs, and
the + .

April 1871.

* Bishop Magee.

WE CROAK

WHEN Stork succeeded Log as King
The poor frogs fared but ill ;
We've both at once—the senseless thing,
The damnable long bill.

May 1871.

IN A CHRISTIAN CHURCHYARD

THIS field of stones, he said,
May well call forth a sigh ;
Beneath them lie the dead,
On them the living lie.

May 1871.

OUR CONGRATULATIONS
ON THE
RECOVERY OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS

THOUGH we have not a God to thank for this grace,
Though we care not a fig for the man,
We have yet our share in the general joy
At the lengthening of his span.

Yes, because we scorn himself and his race,
And because we love not the crown,
We are truly pleased that this model prince
May add to its bright renown.

If we wished him well we might wish him gone ;
As it is, we rejoice in his breath ;
For his life is likely to damage the throne
Such a great deal more than his death.

January 1872.

PATHETIC EPITAPH

I.

GOULD and Fisk in sacred league
Were full bold :
Gould has lost his precious fisc,
Fisk his gold.

II.

When one leads an Erie life,
He must risk
Even such an eerie death,
Sweet James Fisk.*

1872.

* James Fisk, a great American "financier," famous for his dealings with the Erie Railroad Stock, was shot in 1872 by Gould, one of his victims.

SONG

"THE Nightingale was not yet heard,
For the Rose was not yet blown." *
His heart was quiet as a bird
Asleep in the night alone,
And never were its pulses stirred
To breathe or joy or moan :
The Nightingale was not yet heard
For the Rose was not yet blown.

Then She bloomed forth before his sight
In passion and in power,
And filled the very day with light,
So glorious was her dower ;
And made the whole vast moonlit night
As fragrant as a bower :
The young, the beautiful, the bright,
The splendid peerless Flower.

* "Traveller in Persia" (Mr. Binning) ; cited by Mr. Fitzgerald in the notes to his translation of Omar Khayyam.

Whereon his heart was like a bird
When Summer mounts his throne,
And all its pulses thrilled and stirred
To songs of joy and moan,
To every most impassioned word
And most impassioned tone ;
The Nightingale at length was heard
For the Rose at length was blown.

February 1877.

WILLIAM BLAKE

He came to the desert of London town
Grey miles long ;
He wandered up and he wandered down,
Singing a quiet song.

He came to the desert of London town,
Mirk miles broad ;
He wandered up and he wandered down,
Ever alone with God.

There were thousands and thousands of human kind
In this desert of brick and stone :
But some were deaf and some were blind,
And he was there alone.

At length the good hour came ; he died
As he had lived, alone :
He was not missed from the desert wide,
Perhaps he was found at the Throne.

1866.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE INFERNO

I.—RELATING TO THE APOTHEOSIS OF A NOBLE UNIVERSAL GENIUS.

(See especially opening of Canto V., and close of Canto XXI.)

"A Great Soul! A great bladder for dried peas to rattle in."
GEORGE ELIOT, *Middlemarch*.

ERE we left Minos after parleying
To trace the second circle's storm of gloom,
There came with haughty strides a monstrous Thing

Among the spirits crowding for their doom :
I ween that when it crossed in Charon's boat
No other freightage in that boat found room.

Who, what art thou, roared hard the judge's throat,
More hugeous than my grandson's fierce man-bull?
The thing swelled chanting on a lofty note :

I am a poet of the Beautiful,
Priest of the Good, and Prophet of the True ;
Clothed thick with glory as a sheep with wool :

I sole have done what twenty great men do ;
 Historian, statesman, orator and sage,
 Wit, dramatist, and Fiction's master, who

Have pictured every clime and every age,
 Have written everything in every style,
 And read the Tome of Thought through page by page :

The Pilgrim-Genius, travelling mile by mile,
 This orbèd whole of Matter and Idea,
 Is comprehensive and not versatile ;

And I—Be damned ! Great Jove, did e'er one
 see a
 Creature like this 'mong men or beasts or birds ?
 A dictionary with the diarrhoea

Could hardly spout such feculent flux of words :
 Strip, strip ; I cannot judge you till I know
 What core of life this shaggy bulk engirds.

The thing screamed : Ai ! Ai ! ever woe
 For the Promethean-souled ; uncomprehended
 By men on earth, abhorred by fiends below,

Pursued with fear and jealous anger blended
 By the monopolising Gods above !
 Be firm, O Titan heart, thou unbefriended ;

Nor sour the sweetness of thy solemn love
For the Illimitable Fathomless,
Wherein the eagle droops as droops the dove,

With thought of gnats that sting thy nakedness !—
Strip naked first ! snarled Minos ; and the Shape-
less Shape
Must piece by piece cast off its wondrous dress :

Cloak, tunic, surplice, toga, mantle, cape,
Hood, bonnet, hat, boot, slipper, buskin, sock,
Bulged slowly to a heap that well might drape

A college of professors with their flock,
And furnish 'guises for a masquerade,
And still leave six old clo'-men ample stock.

The process went on till we grew dismayed ;
The Bulk and Voice together dwindling down :
And when at intervals the sad work stayed

For desperate protests, Minos with his frown
And snarl of Strip, strip ! urgent as a whip,
Compelled renewal. Ah me ! take a brown

Ripe Spanish onion, and proceed to strip
It very patiently fold after fold ;
So small at length you'll find the central pip,

So large the volume of the swathes unrolled ;
And even so through piteous tears your eyes
That core when reached but dimly will behold.

But soon my tears were dashed off by surprise :
The Kernel of that Shapeless Shape hopped there
Upon its mount of cloth of many dyes,

A restless bladder-skin distent with air,
And sundry pebbles or baked peas within
That rattled as it danced. Then Minos sware,

The while some humour curled his savage grin :
I sit to judge real living human souls,
Not lively windbags : now you next, begin :

And went on with his calling o'er the coals
As who would make up for lost time. I said,
How gayly, Master dear, it leaps and rolls

Unto its own dry rhythmus, quick or dead :
Where are the Good, the Beautiful, the True ?
Whither have Wisdom, Wit and Genius fled ?

And he : That heap of clothes must answer you ;
I can't think how it ever made them fit on,
For they are of all fashions old and new,

310 SUPPLEMENT TO THE INFERNO

And of all sizes : whensoever it lit on
Garments which to its fancy beautiful were
Of Greek, Jew, Roman, German, Gaul or Briton ;

And whether they of linen, silk or wool were
It must have begged or filched them for its pile,
Till froggy swelled as large as if it bull were :

Mark well, those peas which frisk in rapid style
From point to point within the orbèd bladder
Are comprehensive and not versatile.

Then I who always in his smile grew gladder
Said : Master, ere in this we touch the ground
Behoves another step down reason's ladder :

Dried peas within, a tumid film around,
Which call you soul, or essence of this wonder ?
And He : Its soul is hollowness with sound ;

While it exists these two can never sunder ;
The selfsame soul in bladder and balloon,
In thin pea-rattle and in far-heard thunder :

When thou revisitest the sun and moon
Remember this, and pay no heed at all
To bulks of noisy emptiness. As soon

As he had spoken an outreaching squall
From the great cyclone of that second cirque
Scattered the robes and bore away the ball,

Which soon was lost to vision in the mirk ;
And so I thought Its spurious being ended,
And quite forgot it in our serious work.

But often afterwards as we descended
It flitted past us like a twilight bat,
And seemed to hover wheresoe'er we wended ;

As if endowed with more lives than a cat,
Or by its very want of substance safe,
Dancing upon the tempest which laid flat

Substantial human souls ; and it would chafe
With its most arid noise our ears intent
On solemn words of sinners. Thus the waif

Annoyed us much throughout our sad descent
Until we stood anear that broken bridge
In Malebolge, where the demon lent

Us demon escort to the farther ridge.
*Just as he blew the signal to set out,
The bladder, flung abruptly as a midge

* "Et egli avea del cul fatto trombetta."—A verse too easy to translate. Note that the austere Dante so enjoys this Aristo-

312 SUPPLEMENT TO THE INFERNO

Against the troop, became a silent clout,
Collapsing pierced by Graffiacave's hook ;
Who wheeling his third step faced right about

And held it forth to Malacoda : Look !
If thy sweet lips are moist with trumpeting,
Here is a rag to wipe them ! and he took.
We saw no more of that preposterous Thing.

May 1870.

phanic touch that he chuckles over it, not grimly, through
twelve lines of grave burlesque opening the following Canto
XXII., the only case of such self-indulgence I remember in the
Divine Comedy.

DON GIOVANNI AT COVENT GARDEN

(June 8, 1866)

WHO is this appealing, with archly tender feeling,
To that sturdy rustic as sullen as a boar?
Sweet Zerlina Patti singing *Batti, batti*;
Rustical Masetto sulking sulking more and more.

Envable peasant! sulking must be pleasant
Feasted with such beauty, such caresses and
such art;
Adelina Patti singing *Batti, batti*,
Soul and body singing with the voice that sings
Mozart.

By that sweet love's token, even had she broken
All the ten commandments and twice as many
more,
I would cry, Dear Patti, singing *Batti, batti*,
Sin and sing, you angel, sin and sing *encore*!

314 DON GIOVANNI AT COVENT GARDEN

Darling young Zerlina, charming Adelina,

Long be you the Hebe of this heavenly music-
wine;

First, O Patti, Patti, pouring *Batti, batti*,

Then *Vedrai carino*, the nectar more divine!

AQUATICS (KEW)

TOMMY Tucker came up to Kew,
And he got in a boat—an outrigger too :
 O, but the pity, the pity !
For Tommy had made up his mind to show
His pals and the gals how well he could row.
 Would he were safe in the city !

The thing like a cradle it rocked in the tide,
And he like the blessed babby inside :
 O, but the pity, the pity !
To hire out such shells so light and so slim,
Is cruel as murder, for Tommy can't swim.
 Would he were safe in the city !

And why should they stick out the rowlocks that way?
He couldn't keep both hands together in play :
 O, but the pity, the pity !
He spluttered, missed water, and zig-zag'd the boat,
Each pull made a lurch, brought his heart in his
 throat.
 Would he were safe in the city !

The river was crowded behind and before,
They chaffed, and they laughed, and they splashed,
and they swore :

O, but the pity, the pity !
He twisted his neck to attend to some shout,
A four-oared came rushing, *Confound you, look out !*
Would he were safe in the city !

They made him so nervous, those terrible men,
That he caught enough crabs for a supper of ten :

O, but the pity, the pity !
He crept back, a steamer came snorting astern,
With hundreds on deck—it gave him a turn :
Would he were safe in the city !

A mass of strange faces that all stared and laughed,
And the more Tommy flustered the more they all
chaffed :

O, but the pity, the pity !
They passed him and roared out, *Head on to the
swell !*
But he thought he would rather keep out of it well :
Would he were safe in the city !

So it caught him broadside, and rolled him away,
As a big dog rolls over a puppy in play :
O, but the pity, the pity !

It rolled him right over — *Good Heavens! he'll
drown!*

For his arms they went up, and his head it went down.
Would he were safe in the city!

Three men dragged him out with a hook through
his coat,
He was blue in the face and he writhed at the
throat:

O, but the pity, the pity!
They hung his head down, he was limp as a clout,
But the water once in him refused to turn out:
Would he were safe in the city!

To the house by the bridge then they carried him in;
He was taken upstairs and stripped to the skin:
O, but the pity, the pity!

They wrapt him in blankets, he gave a low moan,
Then lay there as stark and cold as a stone:
Would he were safe in the city.

Then they forced down his throttle neat brandy
galore,
He had taken the pledge, too, a fortnight before:
O, but the pity, the pity!
As it mixed with the water he woke in a fog,
For his belly was full of most excellent grog:
Would he were safe in the city!

He got very sick, then felt better, he said,
Though faintish, and nervous, and queer in the
head :

O, but the pity, the pity !
He paid a big bill, and when it got dark
Went off with no wish to continue the lark :
Would he were safe in the city !

His coat was stitched up, but had shrunk away half,
And the legs of his trousers just reached to the calf :

O, but the pity, the pity !
No hat ; they had stuck an old cap on his head ;
And his watch couldn't tell him the time when he
said :

Thank God I'm safe in the city !

TRANSLATIONS

TRANSLATIONS FROM HEINE

THE PILGRIMAGE TO KEVLAAR.

I.

At the window stood the mother,
In bed the sick son lay ;
"Will you not get up, William,
And see them marching away?"

"I am so ill, O mother,
That I cannot hear or see !
I think of my dead Maggie,
And my heart is broken in me."

"Get up ; we will to Kevlaar,
Take missal and rosarie ;
The Mother of God our Saviour
Will heal thy heart for thee."

They wave the broad church-banners,
They chant the holy song ;
And through Cologne on the Rhine stream,
The procession draws along.

The mother follows the pilgrims,
 And her sick son leadeth she ;
 And their voices join in the chorale :
 " Blessèd be thou, Marie ! "

II.

The Mother of God at Kevlaar
 To-day wears her richest dress ;
 To-day she will be right busy,
 Such numbers come in distress.

And all the poor sick people
 Bring with them offerings meet ;
 They are little waxen figures,
 Many waxen hands and feet.

And who a wax hand offers,
 His hand's wound hurts no more ;
 And who a wax foot offers,
 His foot is healed of its sore.

To Kevlaar went many on crutches,
 Who now can dance all night ;
 And many now play on the viol
 Whose fingers were helpless quite.

The mother took a wax-light,
 And thereout shaped a heart :
 "Take that to our dear Lord's Mother,
 And she will cure thy smart."

Sighing he took the wax heart
 And knelt to the holy form ;
 The tears from his-eyes outstreaming,
 And the words from his heart blood-warm :

"Thou blessed among women,
 God's Virgin pure from taint,
 Thou Queen of the highest Heaven,
 To thee I bring my plaint !

"I lived with my dear mother
 In the city of Cologne,
 The city for many hundreds
 Of churches and chapels known.

"And next to us lived Maggie,
 She lived, she lives not now :
 Marie, I bring thee a wax heart,
 My bleeding heart heal thou !

"Heal thou my heart sore wounded,
 And early and late to thee
 Will I sing and play with fervour
 Blessed be thou, Marie !"

III.

The sick son and his mother
 Were sleeping from all ill,
 When lo, the Mother of Jesus
 Came gliding in so still.

She bent down over the sick one,
 And softly laid her hand
 Upon his heart ; then vanished
 Smiling sweet and bland.

The mother saw all in her dreaming,
 And fain had seen yet more ;
 But she was roused from slumber,
 The dogs made such uproar.

There lay outstretched beside her
 Her son, and he was dead ;
 On the pallid features sparkled
 The light of the morning red.

The mother folded her hands then,
 She felt so wistfully ;
 Devoutly sang she softly :
 " Blessèd be thou, Marie ! "

THE LORELEY.

I KNOW not what evil is coming,
But my heart feels sad and cold ;
A song in my head keeps humming,
A tale from the times of old.

The air is fresh and it darkles,
And smoothly flows the Rhine ;
The peak of the mountain sparkles
In the fading sunset-shine.

The loveliest wonderful Maiden
On high is sitting there,
With golden jewels braiden,
And she combs her golden hair.

With a golden comb sits combing,
And ever the while sings she
A marvellous song through the gloaming
Of magical melody.

It hath caught the boatman, and bound him
In the spell of a wild sad love ;
He sees not the rocks around him,
He sees only her above.

The waves through the pass sweep swinging,
 But boatman or boat is none ;
 And this with her mighty singing
 The LORELEY hath done.

THE MOUNTAIN VOICE.

ALL sadly through the stern ravine
 There rode a horseman brave :
 " Ah ! draw I near to my darling's arms,
 Or near to the gloomy grave ? "
 The echo answer gave :
 " To the gloomy grave ! "

And as the horseman onward rode
 A deep sigh heaved his breast :
 " If I thus early go to the grave,
 Well, in the grave is rest ! "
 The answering voice confessed :
 " In the grave is rest ! "

Slowly adown the rider's cheek
 A tear of sad thought fell :
 " If but in the grave there is rest for me,
 For me in the grave 'tis well ! "
 Whereto the echoing knell :
 " In the grave 'tis well ! "

For many thousand ages
 The steadfast stars above
 Have gazed upon each other
 With ever-mournful love.

They speak a certain language,
 So beautiful, so grand,
 Which none of the philologists
 Could ever understand.

But I have learned it, learned it
 For ever, by the grace
 Of studying one grammar,
 My heart's own darling's face.

In the Rhine, in the beautiful river
 The mighty shadow is thrown
 With its great cathedral,
 Of holy and great Cologne.

One picture in the cathedral,
 On gilded leather wrought,
 Unto my life's wild sorrow
 Hath gracious comfort brought :

The dear Madonna, with floating
 Angels and flowers above ;
 The eyes and the lips and the contours
 Are all just those of my love.

THE Lotus-flower doth languish
 Beneath the sun's fierce light ;
 With drooping head she waiteth
 All dreamily for night.

The Moon is her true lover,*
 He wakes her with his glance :
 To him she unveils gladly
 Her gentle countenance.

She blooms and glows and brightens,
 Intent on him above ;
 Exhaling, weeping, trembling,
 With ever-yearning love.

* In the German, Moon, *Der Mond*, is masculine ; and Sun, *Die Sonne*, feminine.

THE world is dull, the world is blind,
 And daily grows more silly !
 It says of you, my lovely child,
 You are not quite a lily.

The world is dull, the world is blind,
 And judges in stupid fashion :
 It knows not how sweet your kisses are,
 And how they burn with passion.

I BLAME thee not, a broken heart my lot,
 O Love for ever lost ! I blame thee not.
 Though thou art splendid with the diamonds bright,
 There falls no gleam within thy heart's deep night.

I've known this long. I saw thee in clear dream,
 And saw black night within thy soul supreme,
 And saw the worm still fretting at thy heart ;
 I saw how wretched, O my love, thou art.

Yes, thou art wretched, and I blame thee not ;—
 My Love, we both must ever wretched be !
 Until death's peace concludes our fatal lot,
 My Love, we both must ever wretched be !

330 TRANSLATIONS FROM HEINE

I see the scorn which round thy pale lip weaves,
And see thine eyes outlighten haughtily,
And see the pride with which thy bosom heaves ;
And wretched art thou still, wretched as I.

In secret round thy mouth a pain-thrill steals,
Through tears held back thine eyes can scarcely
see,
The haughty breast a bleeding heart conceals ;
My Love, we both must ever wretched be.

THE violets blue of the eyes divine,
And the rose of the cheeks as red as wine,
And the lilies white of the hands so fine,
They flourish and flourish from year to year,
And only the heart is withered and sere.

THE earth is so fair and the heaven so blue,
And the breeze is breathing so warmly too,
And the flowers of the meadow are gleaming through
The sparkling and glittering morning dew,
And the people are joyous wherever I view :
Yet would were I in the grave at rest
Folded close to my lost Love's breast.

I GAZED upon her picture,
Absorbed in dreams of gloom,
Till those beloved features
Began to breathe and bloom.

About her lips came wreathing
That sweet, sweet smile I knew ;
The eyes were softly gleaming
With tears as fresh as dew.

And my tears sprang then also,
The dark cloud's rain was shed :
And, O my Love, I cannot
Believe that thou are dead !

A PINE-TREE standeth lonely
In the North on an upland bare ;
It standeth whitely shrouded
With snow, and sleepeth there :

It dreameth of a palm-tree,
Which far in the East alone
In mournful silence standeth
On its ridge of burning stone.

My darling, thou art flowerlike,
 So tender, pure, and fair ;
 I gaze on thee, and sadness
 Steals on me unaware :

I yearn to lay my hands then
 Upon thy head in prayer,
 That God will keep thee ever
 Thus tender, pure, and fair.

"SAY, where is the maiden sweet,
 Whom you once so sweetly sung,
 When the flames of mighty heat
 Filled your heart and fired your tongue?"

Ah, those flames no longer burn ;
 Cold and drear the heart that fed ;
 And this book is but the urn
 Of the ashes of love dead.

THE old dream comes again to me :
 With May-night stars above,
 We two sat under the linden-tree
 And swore eternal love.

Again and again we plighted troth,
We chattered, and laughed, and kissed ;
To make me well remember my oath
You gave me a bite in the wrist.

|
O darling with the eyes serene,
And with the teeth so white !
The vows were proper to the scene,
Superfluous was the bite.

My darling, we sat together,
We two in our frail boat ;
The night was calm o'er the wide sea
Whereon we were afloat.

The Spectre-Island, the lovely,
Lay dim in the moon's mild glance ;
There sounded sweetest music,
There waved the shadowy dance.

It sounded sweeter and sweeter,
It waved there to and fro ;
But we slid past forlornly
Upon the great sea-flow.

My heart, my heart is mournful,
Yet joyously shines the May ;
I stand by the linden leaning,
High on the bastion grey.

The blue town-moat thereunder
Glides peacefully along ;
A boy in a boat is angling
And whistling a careless song.

Beyond, like a well-known picture,
All small and fair are strewed
Houses and gardens and people,
Oxen and meadows and wood.

The maidens bleach the linen,
And dance in the grass for glee ;
The mill-wheel scatters diamonds,
Its far hum reaches me.

Upon the hoary tower
A sentry-box stands low ;
A youth in his coat of scarlet
There paces to and fro.

He trifles with his musket,
Which gleams in the sunshine red ;
He shoulders and presents it—
I would he shot me dead.

QUESTIONS.

By the sea, by the desert midnight sea,
 Stands a youth,
 His heart full of anguish, his head full of doubt,
 And with sullen lips he questions the waves :—

“ Oh, solve to me the Riddle of Life,
 The painful primordial riddle,
 Which already has racked so many heads,
 Heads in hieroglyphic caps,
 Heads in turbans and black berrets,
 Heads in wigs, and myriad other
 Poor perspiring human heads ;
 What is the meaning of Man ?
 Whence comes he ? Whither goes he ?
 Who dwells there above in the golden stars ? ”

The waves murmur their everlasting murmur,
 The wind sweeps, the clouds scud,
 The stars glitter indifferent and cold,
 And a fool awaits an answer.

As I each day in the morning
 Pass by that house of thine,
 It gives me joy, thou darling,
 When you at the window shine.

Your dark brown eyes they ask me,
 As only sweet eyes can :
 Who art thou, and what ails thee,
 Thou sickly foreign man ?

I am a German poet,
 Well known beyond the Rhine ;
 When men the best names mention,
 Be sure they mention mine.

And what ails me, thou darling,
 Ails many beyond the Rhine ;
 When men the worst woes mention,*
 Be sure they mention mine.

You lovely fisher-maiden,
 Bring now the boat to land :
 Come here and sit beside me,
 We'll prattle hand in hand.

Your head lay on my bosom,
 Nor be afraid of me :
 Do you not trust all fearless
 Daily the great wild sea ?

* Not the worst *instances* of woe ; else this would be peculiar which he has just declared common : but the worst *kinds* of woe ; thus claiming for his people unusual sensibility, or hinting that they are inordinately oppressed.

My heart is like the sea, dear,
Has storm, and ebb, and flow,
And many purest pearl-gems
Within its dim depth glow.

THE moon is fully risen,
And shineth over the sea ;
And I embrace my darling,
Our hearts swell free.

In the arms of the lovely maiden
I lie alone on the strand :
"What sounds in the breeze's sighing ?
Why trembles your white hand ?"

"That is no breeze's sighing,
That is the mermaidens' song,
The singing of my sisters
Whom the sea hath drowned so long."

W H E R E ?

WHERE shall once the wanderer weary
Meet his resting-place and shrine ?
Under palm-trees by the Ganges ?
Under lindens of the Rhine ?

Shall I somewhere in the desert
 Owe my grave to stranger hands?
 Or upon some lonely sea-shore
 Rest at last beneath the sands?

Ever onward! God's wide heaven
 Must surround me there as here;
 And like death-lamps o'er me swinging
 Night by night the stars burn clear.

BODY AND SOUL.

THE poor Soul speaketh to its Clay:
 I cannot leave thee thus; I'll stay
 With thee, with thee in death will sink
 And black Annihilation drink.
 Thou still hast been my second I,
 Embracing me so lovingly;
 A satin feast-robe round my form
 Doubled with ermine soft and warm.
 Woe's me! I dare not face the fact—
 Quite disembodied, quite abstract,
 To loiter as a blessed Naught
 Above there in the realm of Thought,
 Through Heavenly halls immense and frigid,
 Where the Immortals dumb and rigid

Yawn to me as they clatter by
 With leaden clogs so wearily.
 Oh, it is horrible ! Oh, stay,
 Stay with me, thou beloved Clay !
 The Body to the poor Soul said :
 Oh, murmur not, be comforted !
 We all should quietly endure
 The wounds of Fate, which none can cure.
 I was the lamp's wick, and to dust
 Consume ; but thou, the Spirit, must
 Be saved with care, and lifted far
 To shine in heaven, a little star
 Of purest light. I am but cinder,
 Mere matter, rubbish, rotten tinder,
 Losing the shape we took at birth,
 Mouldering again to earth in earth.
 Now, fare thee well, and grieve no more !
 Perchance life is not such a bore
 In Heaven, as you expect up there.
 If you should meet the old Great Bear
 (Not Meyer-Bear *) i' the starry climes,
 Greet him from me a thousand times !

* Meyerbeer, the great musician. Heine in his later years
 lost no opportunity for a skit at him. The poet is also alluding
 to his own "Atta-Troll," whose title-hero is a bear.

CHILDHOOD.

(*To his Sister.*)

My child, we both were children,
 And merry days we saw,
 We used to creep into the fowl-house
 And hide there under the straw.

And then we set up a crowing ;
 The people who passed on the road—
Cock-a-doodle-doo !—they thought it
 Was really a cock that crowed.

The cases that lay in our courtyard,
 We fitted them up with care ;
 And made a magnificent mansion,
 And lived together there.

And the cat of our next-door neighbour
 Came to visit us too ;
 We gave our best bows and courtseys
 With compliments fine and new.

As to her health we asked her,
 With friendly and earnest air ;
 Many old cats have we since asked
 The like with the like deep care.

And often we sat discussing,
 As if we were old and grey ;
 Bemoaning how things were better,
 Better indeed, in our day.

How Love, Truth, Faith had vanished,
 And left the world all bad ;
 How the price of coffee was shameful,
 And money was not to be had ! . . .

Past, past, are the sports of our childhood,
 And all rolls past in sooth,—
 The World, and Time, and Money,
 And Faith, and Love, and Truth.

THE GREEK GODS.*

FULL-ORBED Moon ! Beneath thy light
 Like molten gold far shines the sea ;
 With noonday clearness twilight-enchanted
 It overflows the broad level strand ;

* [Thomson did two versions of this fine but unmetrical poem, at different times, and apparently without comparison. Each version is in some places closer than the other.]

And above in the clear blue starless Heaven
 I see white clouds,
 Like colossal God-forms
 Of shining marble.

No, never, they are not clouds !
 They are indeed the Gods of Hellas,
 Who once so joyously ruled the world ;
 But now, dethroned and desolate,
 Enormous phantoms, wander
 Through the midnight Heaven.

Astonished and dazed I watch
 The ærial Pantheon,
 The solemn, dumb, mysterious procession
 Of giant shapes.
 He there is Kronion, the King of Heaven ;
 Snow-white are the locks of his head,
 The renowned Olympus-shaking locks.
 He holds in his hand the quencht thunderbolts,
 In his countenance is misery and grief,
 And yet evermore the ancient pride.
 Ah, they were better times, O Zeus,
 When thou divinely enjoyedst thy lust
 With youths and nymphs and hecatombs—
 But even the gods reign not for ever,
 The young vanquish the old,—
 As thou once wert allowed to vanquish

Thy hoary father and thy Titanic kindred,
Jupiter Parricida !

Thee too I recognise, haughty Juno,
In spite of all thy vigilant anxiety
Another has grasped the sceptre,
And thou art no more the Queen of Heaven,
And thy large eyes are beamless,
And thy pure white arms have no strength ;
And never more shall thy vengeance smite
The God-embraced damsel,
And the God's irresistible Son.
Thee too I recognise, Pallas Athene !
With thine Ægis and thy wisdom could'st thou not
Avert the destruction of the Gods ?
And thee also know I, thee also, Aphrodite,
Once the golden, now the silvern !
Still thou art adorned with the love-charm of thy cestus,
And I yearn with compassion for thy beauty,
And could'st thou give me but one embrace,
Like other heroes, I might pine to death :
As the corpse of a goddess appearest thou to me,
Venus Libitina !
No more with love burns towards thee
The gaze of the terrible Ares.
And, oh, how sad looks Phœbus Apollo,
The ever young ! His lyre is silent,
That thrilled such joy thro' ambrosial feasts.

And even sadder looks Hephaistos,
 And verily, poor Cripple ! nevermore
 Shall he stumble above there in his office—
 Busily pouring out the divine nectar ;
 And long, long, has been utterly extinguished
 The inextinguishable laughter of the Gods.

I have never loved you, O ye Gods !
 For not at all to my mind are the Greeks,
 And the Romans I thoroughly hate ;
 Yet pious compassion and sorrowful sympathy
 Possess my heart,
 When I see you now above there
 Desolate deities,
 Dead, night-wandering shadows,
 Frail clouds, driven by the wind,—
 And when I think how mean and blatant
 The Gods are who have overcome you,
 The new, dominant, melancholy Gods,
 So malignant in their sheep's clothing of humility—
 O then seizes me a gloomy rage,
 And I could shatter the new temple,
 And fight for you, you ancient Gods,
 For you and your joyous ambrosial sway,
 And before your high altars
 Broad-built and steaming with sacrifices,
 I could even kneel and pray
 And suppliant arms uplift.

Though always aforetime, O ye Gods,
 In the battles and dissensions of men,
 Ye have fought on the side of the strongest ;
 Yet man is more magnanimous than you,
 And in the battle of the Gods I range myself
 With the followers of the vanquished Gods.

December 1862.

THE GODS OF GREECE.

(Another Version.)

FULL-BLOSSOMED Moon ! Beneath thy light
 Liquidly golden outshines the sea ;
 Noonday clearness with twilight glamour,
 It overflows the broad level strand ;
 And in the clear blue starless heaven
 Float the white clouds,
 Like colossal God statues
 Of purest marble.

No, never, no, these are not clouds !
 They are themselves the very Gods of Hellas,
 Who once so joyously ruled the world ;
 But now disinherited and slain,
 Wander, enormous phantoms,
 The waste of the midnight heaven.

Astonished and dazed, I behold
 The aërial Pantheon,
 The solemnly dumb, terribly advancing
 Gigantic forms.
 He there is Kronion, the King of Heaven,
 Snow-white are the locks of his head,
 The locks at whose shaking Olympus shook.
 His hand still grasps the quenched thunderbolt,
 In his countenance woe and sorrow,
 And yet evermore the ancient pride.
 Those were better times, O Zeus,
 When you divinely delighted
 In boys and nymphs and hecatombs ;
 But even the Gods do not rule for ever,
 The young supplant the old,
 As you yourself supplanted
 Hoary sire and Titan-uncles,
 Jupiter Parricida !
 Thee also I recognise, proud Hêrê !
 Maugre all thy jealous anxiety
 Another has won the Sceptre,
 And thou art no more the Queen of Heaven ;
 And thy large eyes are quenched,
 And thy white arms are powerless,
 And nevermore shall thy vengeance smite
 The God-caressed damsel,
 And the labour-conquering Son of the God.
 Thee also I know, Pallas Athênê !

With thy shield and thy wisdom couldst thou not
Avert the catastrophe of the Gods?

Thee also I know, thee also, Aphrodite,
Once the golden, now the silvern !
Still adorns thee the love-compelling girdle,
And in secret I have terror of thy beauty ;
And could thy liberal body bless me,
Like other heroes I should die with anguish—
As Goddess of the Dead appearest thou to me
Venus Libitina !

No more with love gazes toward thee
There the terrible Ares.

How mournfully regardeth Phœbus Apollo,
The Youth ever young ; silent his lyre
Which so joyously rang at the feast of the Gods.
Yet more miserable looks Hephaistos,
And truly, the Lameter, nevermore
Will he take Hêbé's office,
And pour, busy in the assemblage,
The sweet nectar. And long has been extin-
guished
The inextinguishable laughter of the Gods.

I have never loved you, O ye Gods !
For not at all to my mind are the Greeks,
And the Romans I thoroughly hate ;
Yet holy compassion and shuddering sympathy
Stream through my heart,

When I see you now there above,
 Desolate Gods,
 Dead, night-wandering Shadows,
 Frail clouds driven by the wind ;
 And when I reflect how dastardly, how windy
 Are the Gods who vanquished you,
 The new-reigning melancholy Gods,
 The malignants in sheep's-clothing of humility,
 Oh then I am seized with a sombre rage,
 And would tear down the new Temples,
 And fight for you, ye older Gods,
 For you and your good ambrosial sway ;
 And at your high altars
 The re-erected, smoking with sacrifice,
 I could even myself kneel and pray,
 And supplicating arms uplift.
 I know right well, ye ancient Gods,
 That always of old in the strifes of men
 Ye have held with the party of the victors ;
 But Man is more magnanimous than you,
 And in the Battle of the Gods I hold
 With the party of the conquered Gods.

* * * * *

So I spake, and visibly thereover
 Blushed the pallid cloudy forms,
 And regarded me as regard the Dying,
 Pain-transfigured, and suddenly vanished ;

Even then hid the Moon
Behind clouds darkly advancing ;
High resounded the sea,
And triumphantly came forth into heaven
The eternal Stars.

July 1866.

IN HARBOUR.

HAPPY the Man who has reached his haven,
And left behind him the sea and its tempests,
And now warm and tranquil sits
In the good Wine-cellar at Bremen.

How all the world familiarly and sweetly
In the wine-glass is perfectly mirrored,
And how the mantling Microcosmos *
Sunnily flows down through the thirsty heart !
All things I see in the glass,—
Ancient and modern people's stories,
The Turks and the Greeks, Hegel and Gans,†
Citron-forests and esplanades,

* The Microcosmos, the glass of wine wherein the Macrocosmos is mirrored.

† Gans, Edward, a distinguished pupil of Hegel—but Gans also means *goose*.

350. TRANSLATIONS FROM HEINE

Berlin and Schilda and Tunis and Hamburg ;
But above all the image of my Darling,
The little angel-head on the Rhine-wine-gold-ground.
O how fair, how fair art thou, Belovèd !
Thou art like the rose !
Not like the rose of Shiraz,
The rose sung by Hafiz, the nightingale's bride ;
Not like the rose of Sharon,
The Holy, the prophet-consecrated :
Thou art like the Rose in the Wine-cellar at Bremen ;
That is the Rose of roses !
The older it grows the lovelier it blooms ;
And its heavenly fragrance, it has me enraptured,
It has me inspired, it has me intoxicated :
And held me not fast, to his apron fast,
The Wine-cellar Master of Bremen,
I must topple over !

The dear fellow ! we sat together
And drank like brothers,
We spoke of high mysterious things,
We sighed and sank in each other's arms,
And he has restored me to faith in love ;
I drank to the health of my bitterest enemy,
And all poetasters I freely forgave,
As once myself I shall be forgiven ;
I wept with devotion, and at last
Opened before me the Portals of Prosperity,

Where the Twelve Apostles, the holy great barrels
Silently preach and yet so intelligibly
For all peoples.

These are the fellows !
Uncomely without, in wooden jerkins,
They are within more beautiful and brilliant
Than all the haughty Levites of the Temple,
And Herod's sycophants and courtiers
The gold-bespangled, the purple-arrayed :—
Have I not always affirmed,
Not among your commonplace people,
No, but in the very best society
Lives constantly the King of Heaven.

Hallelujah ! How lovely wave around me
The palms of Beth-el !
How fragrant are the myrrhs of Hebron !
How rushes the Jordan and whirls with joy !
Also my immortal soul whirls,
And I whirl with it, and whirling
Brings me up the steps into the daylight,
The brave Wine-cellar Master of Bremen.

Thou brave Wine-cellar Master of Bremen !
See'st thou on the roofs of the houses sit
The Angels, and are fuddled, and they sing.
The glowing Sun above there

Is only a ruddy drunken Nose,
The Nose of the World-Spirit ;
And round the World-Spirit's ruddy Nose
Reeleth the whole intoxicate World.

1866.

PHILOSOPHY.

THIS World and Life are battered and shattered ;
I must on the German Professor call :
For he puts together Life's pieces scattered,
And makes a beautiful system of all ;
With his worn-out nightgowns and old nightcaps,
He stops up the whole of the poor World's gaps.

February 1866.

HINDOO MYTHOLOGY.

THE great King Viswamitra
Has no rest for his vow
By fighting and by penance
To win Vasishtha's cow.

O, great King Viswamitra,
O, what a bull art thou
To court such strife and sorrow,
And only for a cow.

February 1866.

EPILOGUE

As in the fields grow wheatears,
 So grow and wave in the human mind
 Thoughts.
 But the delicate thoughts of Love
 Are the joyous therein-between-blooming
 Red and blue Flowers.

Red and blue Flowers !
 The sulky reaper casts you away as useless,
 Wooden flails thresh you in scorn,
 Even the penniless wanderer
 Whom sight of you pleases and refreshes,
 Shakes his head
 And calls you useless weeds.
 But the country maiden,
 The garland-wreather,
 Honours you and plucks you,
 And adorns with you her beautiful locks,
 And thus adorned speeds to the dance-place,
 Or to the silent beech-tree,
 Where the voice of the dearest yet sweeter sounds
 Than pipes and rebecks.

August 1866.

REMINISCENCE OF HAMMONIA.*

ORPHAN children pair by pair
March along with joyous air ;
All are in blue dresses cosy,
All with cheeks so plump and rosy :
Oh, the pretty foundling children !

None unmoved can see the sight,
Money box rings left and right ;
From the hands of secret fathers
Many a goodly gift it gathers :
Oh, the pretty foundling children !

Bashful this poor fellow goes
And a thaler in he throws,
For he has a heart ; then budges,
Gaily with his wallet trudges :
Oh, the pretty foundling children !

Then a golden louis d'or
Gives a pious Sir ; before
Just a glance at Heaven crooking
To make sure that God was looking :
Oh, the pretty foundling children !

* Hamburg.

Porters, coopers, servants gay,
 Working-men keep holiday ;
 Many a flask will drink such groundlings
 To the health of these poor foundlings :
 Oh, the pretty foundling children !

Patroness Hammonia
 Follows them incognita,
 Wagging proudly the stupendous
 Masses of her rear tremendous :
 Oh, the pretty orphan children !

On the green before the gate
 Music fills the tent of state,
 Pennons streaming, spangles shining :
 There comes off the happy dining
 Of these pretty orphan children.

There they sit in long drawn file
 Eating in most hearty style ;
 Tarts, too, cakes, and dainties munching,
 Mouselike all the teeth are crunching
 Of these pretty orphan children.

But, alas, the thought occurs
 Of an orphanage much worse,
 Where is no such glad regaling ;
 Wholly wretched dwell bewailing
 Millions there of orphan children.

356 TRANSLATIONS FROM HEINE

Not alike the clothes they wear,
Many have no dinner-fare ;
None goes with the others yonder ;
Lonely in their anguish wander
 Many million orphan children.

July 1870.

TRANSLATIONS FROM GOETHE

PROMETHEUS.

OVERCAST thy heaven, Zeus,
With thunder-clouds ;
And practise, like a boy
Beheading thistles,
On broad oaks and mountain-tops ;
You must yet leave me
My solid earth,
And my hut, which you built not,
And my hearth, whose glow
You envy me.

I know nothing poorer
Under the sun than you gods !
Miserably feeds
On tribute of sacrifice
And breath of prayer,

Your Majesty ;
 And would starve were not
 Children and beggars
 The fools of hope.

When I was a child,
 And knew not how to help myself,
 I raised to the sun my erring glance,
 As if on high had been
 An ear to hear my plaint,
 A heart, like my own,
 To compassionate the distressed.

Who helped me
 Against the Titanic insolence ?
 Who delivered me from death ?
 From slavery ?
 Hast thou not all thyself accomplished,
 Inviolat glowing heart ?
 And didst glow, young and good, and duped,
 Grateful for deliverance
 To the Sleeper above there ?

I honour thee ? Wherefore ?
 Hast thou ever soothed the pangs
 Of the oppressed ?
 Hast thou ever dried the tears
 Of the afflicted ?

Have I not been forged to manhood *
By Time the omnipotent
And eternal Destiny,
My Lords and thine?

Didst thou really think
I should hate life,
And flee to the deserts,
Because not all
My dream-blossoms ripened?
Here sit I, form men
After my image,
A race resembling me,
To suffer, to weep,
To enjoy and rejoice,
Careless of you,
As I myself!

FROM THE "WEST-ÖSTLICHER
DIVAN."

LADY, say what mean those whispers?
What so softly moves your lips?
Whispering to your own self there,
Sweeter than the sweet wine sips!

* Forged, in the original *geschmiedet*, *smith-ed*, wrought with fire and hard hammering; a term magnificently correct.

360 TRANSLATIONS FROM GOETHE

Think you to your mouth's twin sisters
Thus to draw another pair !

I will kiss ! will kiss ! I murmured.

Look ! how in the doubtful darkness
All in bloom the branches glow ;
Downward glitters star on star ;
Greening through the leafage low
Rubies by the thousand sparkle :
Yet from all thy soul is far.

I will kiss ! will kiss ! I murmured.

Even thus, afar, thy lover
Proveth now the bitter-sweet,
Feeleth an unblissful bliss.
Solemnly you vowed to greet
At the full moon, greet each other ;
Now the very moment is.

I will kiss ! will kiss ! I murmur.

TRANSLATIONS FROM DE BERANGER

THE GOOD GOD.

ONE day the good God got out of bed
In a very good humour for us 'tis said ;
He put his nose to the window light,
 " Perhaps their planet has perished quite."
Not yet : in its corner very far
He saw it twining, our little star.
If I can think how they get on there,
Said he, the devil may take me, I swear,
 The devil may take me, I swear.

Black or white, frozen or broiled,
(He said, like a father to children spoiled),
Mortals whom I have made so small,
They pretend that I govern you all ;
But, God be praised, you shall also see
That I have ministers under me :

362 TRANSLATIONS FROM BERANGER

If I don't give the sack to one or two pair,
My children, the devil may take me, I swear,
 The devil may take me, I swear.

To make you live in peace divine,
Have I not given you women and wine?
Yet in my teeth with prayers and boasts
The pigmies call me the Lord of Hosts?
And even dare to invoke my name
When they light the murderous cannon's flame!
If I ever commanded column or square,
My children, the devil may take me, I swear,
 The devil may take me, I swear.

Who are these dwarfs so richly drest,
On gilded thrones in sumptuous rest?
The head anointed, so proud and pert,
These chiefs of your insect-swarms assert,
That I have blessed their rights of place,
That they are kings by my special grace.
If it is by me that they reign thus there,
My children, the devil may take me, I swear,
 The devil may take me, I swear.

Then these other dwarfs, all black, of whom
My poor nose hates the incense fume:
They make of life a dismal fast,
And in my name fierce curses cast

In their sermons, very fine, said he,
 Only, by gad, they're Hebrew to me :
 If I believe anything they declare,
 My children, the devil may take me, I swear,
 The devil may take me, I swear.

Children, enough of this : no sect
 But the good kind hearts shall be my elect :
 Make love to each other and live in joy,
 Without any fear that God will annoy ;
 Laugh down the great and the canting crew—
 But suppose the *mouchards* should hear me ! adieu.
 If into heaven those fellows fare,
 My children, the devil may take me, I swear,
 The devil may take me, I swear.

1864.

THE DEATH OF THE DEVIL.

FOR the miracle that I'll retrace
 Quickly as the sketcher paints,
 Glory be to the Saint Ignace,
 Patron of all our little Saints.
 By a trick which really would seem most
 Infernal if ever Saints misled,
 He has made the Devil give up the ghost :
 The Devil is dead, the Devil is dead.

Satan found him going to dine :
 Drink, or own yourself second-best :
 Done !—but he poured in the Devil's wine
 A powerful poison potently blest.
 Satan drinks, comes the colic quick ;
 He swears, he writhes, he dashes his head,
 At last he bursts like a heretic :
 The Devil is dead, the Devil is dead.

He is dead ! the monks all cry,
 None will purchase another *agnus* :
 He is dead ! the canons sigh,
 Who will pay now for an *oremus* !
 The conclave shook in mortal fear,
 Power and strong-box, adieu ! they said,
 We have lost our Father dear :
 The Devil is dead, the Devil is dead.

Love won't serve us as Fear of old,
 Whose gifts have overfilled our hands ;
 Intolerance is almost cold,
 Who will kindle again its brands !
 If Man escapes us, slips our rope,
 Truth will begin to lift her head,
 God will be greater than the Pope :
 The Devil is dead, the Devil is dead.

Ignatius runs to them with the cry,*
 Give me, give me his place and power ;
 No one was frightened of him, but I—
 I will make even the monarchs cower :
 Robberies, massacres, plagues, or wars
 Everywhere, O I'll flourish, he said ;
 God may have what I fling out of doors :
 The Devil is dead, the Devil is dead.

Ah ! brave homme ! cried all the court,
 We bless thee in thy malice and hate ;
 And at once his order, Rome's support,
 Saw its robe flutter Heaven's gate.
 From the angels tears of pity fell ;
 Poor Man will have cause to rue, they said,
 Saint Ignatius inherits Hell :
 The Devil is dead, the Devil is dead.

1865.

* [The original as printed runs, "while they cry," but this is a mistranslation. Beranger's lines are :

" Ignace accourt : Que l'on me donne,
 Leur *dît-il*, sa place et ses droits."

Thomson presumably wrote "with the cry."]

NOTES

IN arranging the contents of the present volume my object has been to exhibit the author at his best—that is, during the period between 1863 and 1874, when he was in the full possession of his powers, and had not yet been disheartened by disappointment and want of appreciation. I have inserted, it is true, three or four poems of an earlier date, the chief of which is “To our Ladies of Death,” a piece which seems to form a necessary prelude to “The City of Dreadful Night.” It may be thought that it would have been better to arrange the poems in chronological order; but if that had been done some readers might have too hastily judged Thomson by his early work, inferior as that certainly is to his later efforts. Some may think, perhaps, that “The City of Dreadful Night” should have had the place of honour; but I concluded that it was best, on the whole, that the reader should be prepared for the advent of that somewhat formidable masterpiece by first perusing the easier and lighter verse of “Vane’s Story,” and the beautiful narrative of “Weddah and Om-el-Bonain.” With respect to the shorter poems in the volume, though there may be amongst them a few which fall decidedly below Thomson’s general level of achievement, I am yet of opinion that most readers will agree with me in thinking that few volumes of verse contain so many noteworthy pieces, or so many which bear the stamp of originality in thought and excellence in form. In the second volume I have grouped together, under the heading of “Last Poems,”

the pieces written in 1881 and 1882, during the period of the too brief renaissance of the author's poetical genius. Following these will be found the early poems, comprising those written between 1852 and 1864. It will be easy for any reader who desires to study the development of Thomson's powers to do so by the aid of the dates which are affixed to nearly all the poems.

I think I may say of the present edition of Thomson's Poems that it is a practically complete one, and that no additions of importance are ever likely to be made to it. It is true that I have excluded a few—a very few—pieces which in my opinion would not have added to the value of the book, nor to Thomson's reputation; but I have at the same time admitted a good many which, having been printed elsewhere, I could not well omit, though I might have excluded them had I been altogether free to act according to my own judgment. However, I believe the reader will agree with me in thinking that there is very little indeed in these volumes which has not sufficient interest and value to justify its inclusion. Two or three pieces and one or two of the foot-notes may perhaps be objected to, on the ground that they rather overstep the bounds of good taste, and are needlessly offensive in style; but I am not sure myself that any apology is needed for these in view of the fact that there is nothing on which there is more difference of opinion than on questions of good or bad taste.

Vane's Story, p. 1.

This poem was originally called "Gray's Story." The author once told me that he afterwards altered the name to Vane because of its suggesting something vain or unreal.

"Then that dear friend of yours who came" (p. 21).

It is difficult to imagine who is referred to in this passage. Possibly Heine was intended, though the description does not tally with that poet's character at all points. The passage

might well be taken as a description of Thomson himself; and perhaps he was here unconsciously or half-consciously portraying his own character.

"God put him to the torture" (p. 31).

The powerful passage beginning thus and ending—

"The Death-in-Life grew perfect death,"

was an afterthought; it is not in the original MS.

"A restless wanderer, one of these" (p. 37).

This line originally ran thus—

"A man named Shelley, one of these."

"Love a near maid, love a far maid" (p. 46).

The whole of the beautiful passage beginning thus and ending—

"The holy Sabbath comes at last,"

was an afterthought; it is not in the original MS.

"Grossness here indeed is regnant" (p. 50).

The first eight lines of the Epilogue are not in the original MS.

Weddah and Om-el-Bonain, p. 55.

It seems desirable to give the reader the means of judging how far Thomson was really indebted to Henri Beyle for the story of this poem. The author's deprecatory remark as to its meriting a better version than he has given it is likely to lead the reader to think that his obligations to the original story are much greater than they really are. As a matter of fact the story, as related by Beyle, is little more than a bare skeleton as compared with Thomson's richly embellished narrative. As told in *De l'Amour*, it runs thus:—

Queddah, du pays de Yamen, était renommé pour sa beauté entre les Arabes.—Lui et Om-el-Bonain, fille de Abd-el-Aziz, fils de Merouan, n'étant encore que des enfants, s'aimaient déjà tellement, que l'un ne pouvait souffrir d'être un moment séparé

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de l'autre. — Lorsque Om-el-Bonain devint la femme de Oualid-Ben-Abd-el-Malek, Oueddah, en perdit la raison. — Après être resté longtemps dans un état d'égarément et de souffrance, il se rendit en Syrie, et commença à rôder chaque jour autour de l'habitation de Oualid, fils de Malek, sans trouver d'abord de moyen de parvenir à ce qu'il désirait. — A la fin, il fit la rencontre d'une jeune fille qu'il réussit à s'attacher à force de persévérance et de soins. Quand il crut pouvoir se fier à elle, il lui demanda si elle connaissait Om-el-Bonain. — Sans doute, puisque c'est ma maltresse, répondit la jeune fille. — Eh bien ! reprit Oueddah, ta maltresse est ma cousine, et, si tu veux lui porter de mes nouvelles, tu lui feras certainement plaisir. — Je lui en porterai volontiers, répondit la jeune fille. Et là-dessus elle courut aussitôt vers Om-el-Bonain pour lui donner des nouvelles de Oueddah. " Prends garde à ce que tu dis ! s'écria celle-ci. Quoi ! Oueddah est vivant ? — Assurément, dit la jeune fille. — Va lui dire, poursuivit alors Om-el-Bonain, de ne point s'écarter jusqu'à ce qu'il lui arrive un messenger de ma part. " Elle prit ensuite ses mesures pour introduire Oueddah chez elle, où elle le garda caché dans un coffre. Elle l'en faisait sortir pour être avec lui quand elle se croyait en sûreté ; et, quand il arrivait quelqu'un qui aurait pu le voir, elle le faisait rentrer dans le coffre.

Il arriva un jour que l'on apporta à Oualid une perle, et il dit à l'un de ses serviteurs : " Prends cette perle et porte-la à Om-el-Bonain. " Le serviteur prit la perle et la porta à Om-el-Bonain. Ne s'étant pas fait annoncer, il entra chez elle dans un moment où elle était avec Oueddah, de sorte qu'il put lancer un coup d'œil dans l'appartement de Om-el-Bonain sans que celle-ci y prît garde. Le serviteur de Oualid s'acquitta de sa commission, et demanda quelque chose à Om-el-Bonain pour le bijou qu'il lui avait apporté. Elle le refusa sévèrement, et lui fit une réprimande. Le serviteur sortit courroucé contre elle, et, allant dire à Oualid ce qu'il avait vu, il lui décrivit le coffre où il avait vu entrer Oueddah. " Tu mens, esclave sans mère ! tu mens ! lui dit Oualid. " Et il court brusquement chez Om-el-Bonain. Il y avait dans l'appartement plusieurs coffres ; il s'assied sur celui où était renfermé Oueddah, et que lui avait décrit l'esclave, en disant à Om-el-Bonain : " Donne-moi un de ces coffres. — Ils sont tous à toi, ainsi que moi-même, répondit Om-el-Bonain. — Eh bien ! poursuivit Oualid, je désire avoir celui sur lequel je

suis assis.—Il y a dans celui-là des choses nécessaires à une femme, dit Om-el-Bonain.—Ce ne sont point ces choses-là, c'est le coffre que je désire, continua Oualid.— Il est à toi," répondit-elle. Oualid fit aussitôt emporter le coffre, et fit appeler deux esclaves auxquels il donna l'ordre de creuser une fosse en terre jusqu'à la profondeur où il se trouverait de l'eau. Approchant ensuite sa bouche du coffre: "On m'a dit quelque chose de toi, cria-t-il. Si l'on m'a dit vrai, que toute ta trace de toi soit séparée, que toute nouvelle de toi soit ensevelie. Si l'on m'a dit faux, je ne fais rien de mal enfouissant un coffre: ce n'est que du bois enterré." Il fit pousser alors le coffre dans la fosse, et la fit combler des pierres et des terres que l'on en avait retirées. Depuis lors, Om-el-Bonain ne cessa de fréquenter cet endroit, et d'y pleurer jusqu'à ce qu'on l'y trouvât un jour sans vie, la face contre terre.

Two Lovers, p. 105.

Here is the original story as told by Beyle:—

Abou-el-Hassan, Ali, fils d'Abdalla, Elzagouni, raconte ce qui suit: Un musulman aimait une fille chrétienne jusqu'au point d'en perdre la raison. Il fut obligé de faire un voyage dans un pays étranger avec un ami qui était dans la confidence de son amour. Ses affaires s'étant prolongées dans ce pays, il y fut attaqué d'une maladie mortelle, et dit alors à son ami: "Voilà que mon terme approche, je ne rencontrerai plus dans ce monde celle que j'aime, et je crains, si je meurs musulman, de ne pas la rencontrer non plus dans l'autre vie." Il se fit chrétien et mourut. Son ami se rendit auprès de la jeune chrétienne, qu'il trouva malade. Elle lui dit: "Je ne verrai plus mon ami dans ce monde; mais je veux me retrouver avec lui dans l'autre: ainsi donc je rends témoignage qu'il n'y a d'autre dieu que Dieu, et que Mohammed est le prophète de Dieu." Là-dessus, elle mourut, et que la miséricorde de Dieu soit sur elle.

To our Ladies of Death, p. 112.

This poem, as originally published in the *National Reformer*, was entitled "To the Youngest of our Ladies of

Death." A prefatory note was there prefixed to it, which it seems worth while to reproduce :—

"MY DEAR ICONOCLAST,—I transcribed this piece for you, intending to introduce it with a few remarks upon the doctrine of the immortality of the human soul ; but I have not been able to catch the few right words, and the rhyme itself is so lengthy that I must not also inflict upon the patient reader a long preface of reason or unreason. Suffice it, then, for me to affirm that in my calmest and purest hours of contemplation, my own verdict upon my own life attests this poem (which was written more than a year since) to be genuine as the utterance of my individual self ; whether it is true or not for others themselves must decide. It may be worth while to remark that the Three Ladies were suggested by the sublime sisterhood of 'Our Ladies of Sorrow' in the 'Suspiria de Profundis,' and that the stanza was moulded under the influence of 'The Guardian Angel' in 'Men and Women.' So, if any good reader finds no good in this poem, let me humbly suggest that he or she may most easily and profitably forget it in the study of those noble works of Thomas de Quincey and Robert Browning.—
Fraternally yours, B. V."

Prologue to the Pilgrimage to Saint Nicotine, p. 273.

The poem of which this is the beginning was written to accompany and explain a large coloured plate issued by Messrs. Cope, of Liverpool—an imitation or rather burlesque of Stothard's "Canterbury Pilgrims." Each of the Pilgrims represented some prominent personage of the time, and the verses summed up, in a few pungent lines, his or her characteristics. The whole poem is worth reprinting, but this could not well be done without reprinting the plate also.

Who killed Moses, p. 296.

Thomson translated in 1866 Goethe's Essay on the Biblical account of the doings of the Israelites in the wilderness. In the course of his argument Goethe comes to the conclusion which Thomson has here versified.

William Blake, p. 305.

This poem forms the conclusion of Thomson's Essay on the Poems of William Blake.

Supplement to the Inferno, p. 306.

I suppose it is hardly necessary to say that the person attacked in this truculent satire is the first Lord Lytton. It may be thought that the satire is somewhat too severe, considering the undeniable cleverness of its subject; but there was about Lord Lytton a palpable insincerity and a want of manliness which made him hateful to all true men. Thackeray satirised him as mercilessly as Thomson, though in a different way. No one who was not a cad himself could have created those two champion cads of literature (as John Hollingshead has styled them), Claude Melnotte and Alfred Evelyn.

END OF VOL. I.

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